OCTOBER
20th
1924
25c

PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

W. C. Tuttle
Talbot Mundy
Bruce Johns

Barry Scobee
John Dorman
Georges Surdez

Charles Victor Fischer
Leo Walmsley
Alanson Skinner

1 Complete Novel
2 Complete Novelettes

Boyce-ite

Every time you buy gasoline

Look for the Boyce-ite advertising in

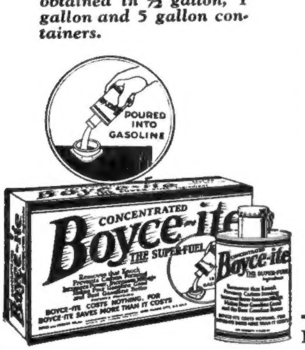
Saturday Evening Post
Country Gentleman
Hearst's International
Cosmopolitan
Red Book
System
Ainslee's Magazine
Everybody's Magazine
Munsey's Magazine
People's Magazine
Popular Magazine
Short Stories
Adventure
Argosy-All Story Magazine
Detective Story Magazine
Western Story Magazine
Love Story Magazine
Top-Notch
Sunset Magazine

and leading newspapers here and abroad.

To date over 11,000,000 cans of Boyce-ite have been sold—Boyce-ite is now carried by dealers in every city, town and hamlet in the United States.

Convenient touring package fits the pocket of your car—contains 3 cans of Boyce-ite—$1.00.

Boyce-ite can also be obtained in ½ gallon, 1 gallon and 5 gallon containers.



Experienced motorists of America have formed a new habit—the habit of using Boyce-ite every time they buy gasoline.

The Boyce-ite habit is a good habit—an economical habit.

—Boyce-ite makes your motor start easier.

—gives it more power—smoother operation.

—adds from 1 to 6 miles to every gallon of gasoline you buy.

—and does away forever with the expense and annoyance of grinding valves, cleaning spark plugs and removing carbon.

Boyce-ite makes old cars run better and new cars last longer. No one knows how far a carbonless motor will run.

Now the proper and economical way to use Boyce-ite is not occasionally—not now and then—but every time you buy gasoline.

Occasional use of course affords temporary relief—but it seems foolish to remove carbon today and allow it to form again tomorrow.

Even a speck of carbon causes premature wear, perhaps at some vital part—and all gasoline forms carbon until it has been treated with Boyce-ite.

The moment carbon begins to accumulate, your car is headed for the repair shop.

Remember, Boyce-ite has passed the "wonder if" stage—every motorist who has used it continuously knows that it is the best fuel for his motor, and whether you drive a Ford or a Rolls-Royce you will find it true.

You are not pioneering when you join the army of those who use Boyce-ite every time they buy gasoline but are lagging behind the times until you do.

Harrison Boyce

BOYCE & VEEDER CO., Inc., *Manufacturers of Boyce-ite exclusively*, L. I. C., N. Y.

This advertisement copyright by Harrison Boyce

Adventure

Registered in
U. S. Patent Office

Oct 20th 1924 Vol. XLIX No 2

Published Three Times a Month by The Ridgway Company

J. H. GANNON, President C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York, N. Y.
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in advance

Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian postage, 90 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered; Copyright, 1924, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. Entered at Stationers' Hall, London, England.

The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Contents for October 20th, 1924, Issue

The Dead-Line *A Complete Novel* . . . . **W. C. Tuttle** 1
West—"*Hashknife*" *Hartley* found it dividing cattle and sheep.

Seven Who Went But Once . . . . **John Dorman** 74
Louisiana—a dare to a gambler.

Salt on a Bird's Tail *A Complete Novelette* . . . . . **Charles Victor Fischer** 80
Pacific—the gunner makes a good "hook-up."

Dusty . . . . **Leo Walmsley** 97
Africa—the fighting mongoos means death to rats—and other things.

Om *A Six-Part Story Part II* . . . . **Talbot Mundy** 104
India—on toward the "Middle Way."

The Filibuster Navy *Nicaragua* . . . . . . **Eugene Cunningham** 133

A Well in the Desert . . . . **Alanson Skinner** 134
New Mexico—it belonged to a sheepherder.

The Mountaineer . . . . **Georges Surdez** 137
France—a bowman against men in armor.

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from preceding page)

The Valley of Remorse *A Complete Novelette* . . . . **Bruce Johns** 151
California—Hindus on a white man's trail.

The Camp-Fire **A free-to-all meeting-place for readers, writers and adventurers** 175

Camp-Fire Stations 182

Lost Trails 183

Various Practical Services Free to Any Reader 183

Ask Adventure 184
A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising sixty-three geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons Past and Present, Salt and Fresh Water Fishing, Tropical Forestry, Aviations, Army Matters, United States and Foreign; and American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung 191

The Trail Ahead 192

Headings . . . . **John R. Neill**

Cover Design . . . . **A. L. Ripley**

One Novel and Two Novelettes Complete

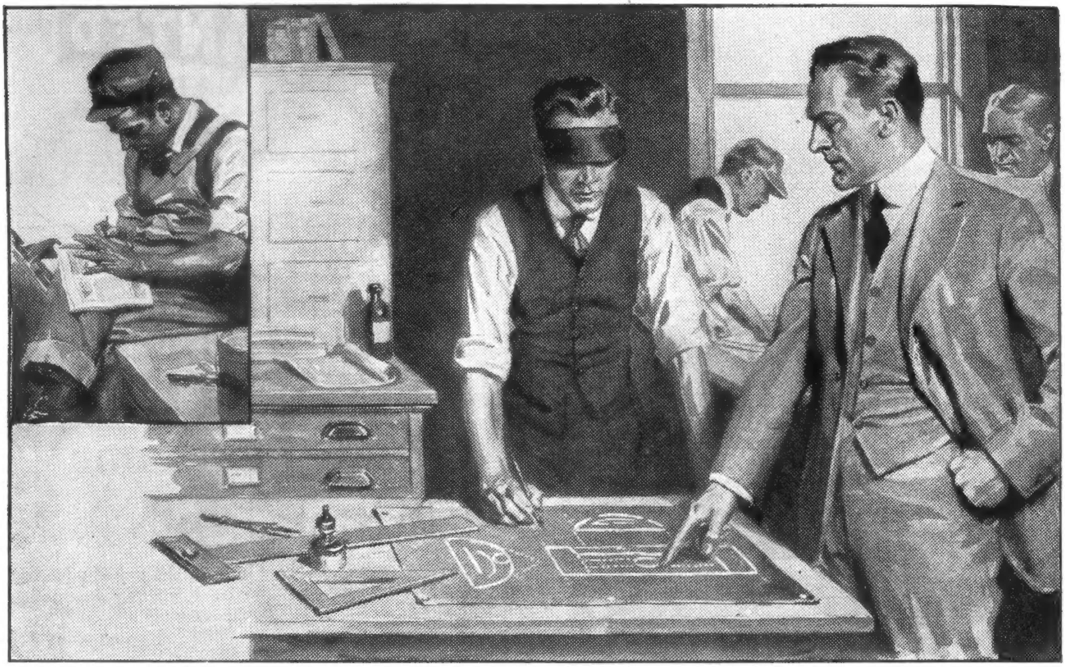
SINGING "Susannah," the '49ers sailed from Boston for California, visions of gold, easily won, holding them to their course. But the passage was hard, the elements unfavorable and the malicious influence of *Dias* was everywhere. "SOUTH, WEST AND NORTH," a complete novel by H. Bedford-Jones in the next issue.

THOUGH he had looked upon the *vin* when it was *blanc* he outshot the Brigadier, who knew a thing or two about rifles. Thereafter he met with much trouble. "TUB TOBIN REPEATS," a complete novelette by Douglas Oliver in the next issue.

TO PAVIA, where the grim walls of a castle held a prisoner, rode *Silvain de St. Lo* and *Thibault* on an errand of honor. "THE MOOR OF MILAN," a complete novelette by H. C. Bailey in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month



He Gets $100 A Week Now

A LITTLE over a year ago he was just a hand—an untrained worker doing ordinary work and getting an ordinary salary.

He saw other men—*younger men*—getting better positions and larger salaries, and he wondered why. And the more he thought about it, the more clearly he realized that it was because they were trained and he was not. He was being paid only for the work of his hands. His brain didn't count.

So he determined that he, too, would take up a course with the I. C. S. He studied at home in the evenings and in spare moments during the day.

And success came, as it always comes, to men who really study their work. In three months he was assistant foreman—then foreman—and then one day they called him into the head office to supervise all blue-print work.

He's earning $100 a week now, and to quote the head of the firm—"That's only a start. He has the brightest future of any man in the organization."

TRAINING! That's what did it! Training that taught him how to do things that the other men could not do. Training that made his work stand out and brought him to the attention of the firm. Training that fitted him to undertake larger responsibility when Opportunity came.

How much longer are *you* going to wait before taking the step that is bound to bring you advancement and more money?

No matter where you live, the International Correspondence Schools will come to you. No matter what your handicaps or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply written, wonderfully illustrated I. C. S. text-books make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 300 I. C. S. courses will surely suit your needs.

This is all we ask: Without cost, without obligation, put it up to us to prove how we can help you.

Mail the coupon to-day

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2046-D, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please tell me how I can qualify for the position or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X:

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management
☐ Industrial Management
☐ Personnel Organization
☐ Traffic Management
☐ Business Law
☐ Banking and Banking Law
☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)
☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting
☐ Bookkeeping
☐ Private Secretary
☐ Spanish ☐ French
☐ Salesmanship
☐ Advertising
☐ Better Letters
☐ Show Card Lettering
☐ Stenography and Typing
☐ Business English
☐ Civil Service
☐ Railway Mail Clerk
☐ Common School Subjects
☐ High School Subjects
☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Electrical Engineering
☐ Electric Lighting
☐ Mechanical Engineer
☐ Mechanical Draftsman
☐ Machine Shop Practice
☐ Railroad Positions
☐ Gas Engine Operating
☐ Civil Engineer
☐ Surveying and Mapping
☐ Metallurgy
☐ Steam Engineering
☐ Radio
☐ Architect
☐ Architects' Blue Prints
☐ Contractor and Builder
☐ Architectural Draftsman
☐ Concrete Builder
☐ Structural Engineer
☐ Chemistry ☐ Pharmacy
☐ Automobile Work
☐ Airplane Engines
☐ Navigation
☐ Agriculture and Poultry
☐ Mathematics

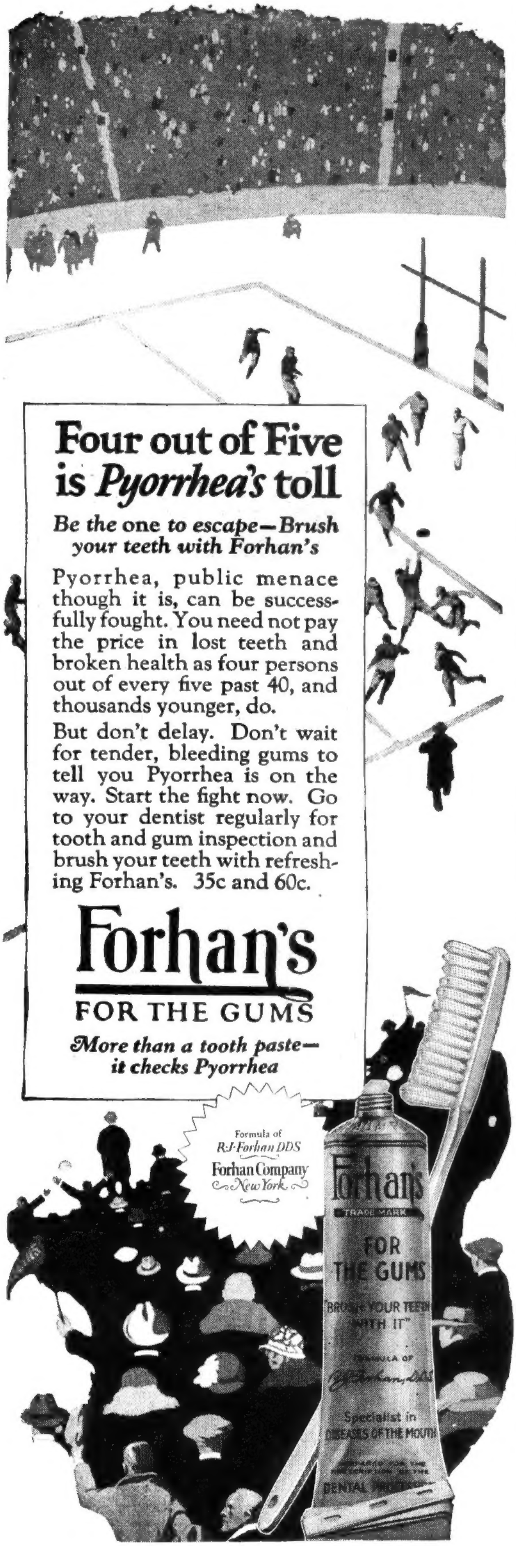
Name...

Street Address.. 3-6-24

City..State.............................

Occupation..

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.



Four out of Five is *Pyorrhea's* toll

Be the one to escape—Brush your teeth with Forhan's

Pyorrhea, public menace though it is, can be successfully fought. You need not pay the price in lost teeth and broken health as four persons out of every five past 40, and thousands younger, do.

But don't delay. Don't wait for tender, bleeding gums to tell you Pyorrhea is on the way. Start the fight now. Go to your dentist regularly for tooth and gum inspection and brush your teeth with refreshing Forhan's. 35c and 60c.

Forhan's

FOR THE GUMS

More than a tooth paste—it checks Pyorrhea

MEN WANTED

EARN

$35 to $100 per Week

Hundreds of trained men wanted for high-pay Automobile work. We train you in the big Greer Auto Shops. Earn while you learn. We get you the job. Good pay **Automobile** job **Guaranteed** after training. We have trained 47,781 men; 30,245 of these now in business for themselves. Big Summer and Fall demand for Auto mechanics. You can double your present pay. Learn all about it.

Write for full particulars and **Free Auto Book.** Address me personally and tell something about yourself.

GARAGE

Free Book

Erwin Greer, President

GREER
COLLEGE
Automotive Engineering
2024 S.Wabash Ave., Dept. 2218, Chicago, Ill.

Let *Us* Pay Your Christmas Bills

DURING the next few months hundreds of men will earn all the Christmas money they need as special representatives of ADVENTURE, THE DELINEATOR, EVERYBODY'S and THE DESIGNER.

Thousands upon thousands of subscriptions are due for renewal *right now.* Let us show you how easily you can get the orders in your community—*at a big profit.*

No experience is necessary. You begin making money as soon as you hear from us. Send the coupon for full particulars—*now!*

Manager, Staff Agencies Division,
Box 1118, Butterick Building, New York City

Name . . . .

Street . . . .

City. . . . . State. . . . .

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can earn $1 to $2 an hour in your spare time writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We instruct you by our new simple Directograph System, supply you with work and pay you cash each week. Write today for full particulars and free booklet.

WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE LIMITED
Authorized Capital $1,250,000.00
204 **Colborne Building, Toronto, Can.**

BUCHSTEIN'S FIBRE LIMB

is soothing to your stump—strong, cool, neat, light. Guaranteed 5 years. Easy payments. Send for Catalog Today.

Also fibre arms, and braces for all deformities.

A. Buchstein Co.,
610 3rd Ave., S.
Minneapolis, Minn.

For the growing youngster Beeman's is a pure and healthful treat—its daily use is *"a sensible habit"*

BEEMAN'S
PEPSIN
CHEWING GUM
GOOD FOR DIGESTION

BEEMAN'S

Pepsin Gum

AMERICAN CHICLE CO.

HEAT *Without Coal*

Amazing invention does away with coal or wood. The Instant-Gas Oil Burner sets in firebox of any stove or furnace; burns 96% air and 4% oil. Gives three times the heat of coal, and cheaper. Better cooking and baking. Installed without damage to stove in five minutes—to furnace in an hour. Over 60,000 in use. Sold on money-back guarantee and 30-day free trial. Low introductory price to first users in locality. Write today for Free Book, "Scientific Oil Burning." Mention whether for stove or furnace.

AGENTS WANTED
We pay $60 a week. Write for free sample offer.

INTERNATIONAL HEATING COMPANY
Dept. 91-J, 117 South 14th St., St. Louis, Mo.

LAW

STUDY AT HOME

Become a lawyer. Legally trained men win high positions and big success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Lawyers earn

$3,000 to $10,000 Annually

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Let us send you records and letters from LaSalle students admitted to the bar in various states. Degree of LL.B. conferred. Thousands of successful students enrolled. Low cost, easy terms. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Get our valuable 120-page "Law Guide" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them—NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 976-L, Chicago, Ill.

$1,000.00 *in* cash prizes

For NEW ways of using

G Washington's

Delicious-Instant

Coffee

Housewives everywhere know G. Washington's Coffee—how good—how convenient it is. The coffee ready to drink when dissolved in hot water. The coffee with the delicious flavor.

G. Washington's Coffee is wonderful for preparing desserts, ices, jellies, cakes, candies and other dainties. By simply adding G. Washington's Coffee to other ingredients, a delicious coffee flavor is obtained. It comes in concentrated powdered form and no water is required. Its use in desserts is simplicity itself and results are certain.

If you can make good cake, a new dessert or confection, enter this contest, which is limited to those who have used G. Washington's Coffee prior to September 1, 1924.

$1,000 in cash prizes for new G. Washington's Coffee recipes. First prize is $500. No restrictions, no conditions.

LIST OF PRIZES

For G. Washington's Coffee New Recipes

For the best	$500
For the next best	250
For the next best	75
For the next best	50
For the next best	25
For the 20 next best, $5 each	100
Twenty-five prizes in all	$1,000

Contest Closes Dec. 31, 1924.

All prizes will be paid on or before February 1st, 1925, and in event of tie for any prize offered, the full amount of such prize will be awarded to tying contestants.

The judges of the contest will be chosen from a selected list of managers and famous chefs of the leading hotels of New York City.

G Washington's
PREPARED COFFEE
MADE IN THE CUP
AT THE TABLE
ABSOLUTELY PURE SOLUBLE COFFEE

Write recipe on one side of paper only. No letters can be answered concerning the contest. All recipes must be mailed on or before December 31, 1924, and to become our property.

Use the coupon below, or a copy of it, attaching your suggestions for new recipes.

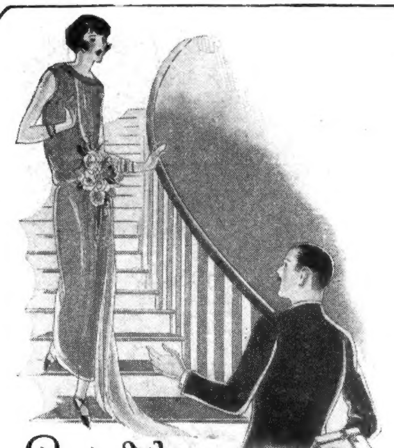
COUPON

G. Washington Coffee Refining Co.
522 Fifth Ave., New York City, Contest Dept. No. 7
Enclosed find recipes for using G. Washington's Coffee.

Name . . . .

Street and No. . . . .

City . . . . State . . . .



Slender Women are more popular ~

A graceful slender girl holds a fascination which only slender women have.

Men admire a youthful silhouette. Instinctively, they are drawn towards the woman whose figure is graceful and shapely. That's why slender girls are always popular.

But why worry about being overweight? It's easy to reduce. Use Marmola Tablets (thousands of men and women each year regain healthy, slender figures this way). These tablets will make you slender again. Try them. No exercises or diets.

All drug stores have them—one dollar a box. Or they will be sent in plain wrapper, postpaid, by the Marmola Co., 1715 General Motors Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

MARMOLA

Prescription Tablets

The Pleasant Way to Reduce

MAKE MONEY AT HOME

YOU CAN earn good money at home in your spare time making show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We show you how, supply both men and women work at home no matter where you live and pay you cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. Write to-day.

AMERICAN SHOW CARD SYSTEM LIMITED

108 Adams Building Toronto, Canada

FORD RUNS 57 MILES ON GALLON OF GASOLINE

A new automatic and self-regulating device has been invented by John A. Stransky, 2676 Fourth St., Pukwana, South Dakota, with which automobiles have made from 40 to 57 miles on a gallon of gasoline. It removes all carbon and prevents spark plug trouble and overheating. It can be installed by anyone in five minutes. Mr. Stransky wants agents and is willing to send a sample at his own risk. Write him today.—Adv.

Be Independent!

Homer E. Minor
of Texas

"Six months after I started my magazine subscription work I cleared over $1,000.00. My business increased over one thousand per cent. last year."

WHY depend on just your present salary when you can so easily have all the comforts and luxuries that make life worth living?

You *can* do better—especially if you have a little spare time. For hundreds of men like Homer E. Minor of Texas are right now earning $10 to $20 and more a week in their spare time as special sales representatives of ADVENTURE, EVERYBODY'S, THE DELINEATOR and THE DESIGNER. What they have done you can do too.

This work is easy, dignified and profitable. From the beginning, you will be carefully *trained* to make the most of the subscription business of your community. Big commissions and salary. Write for free particulars including working materials *now!*

Mail This Coupon Today

Box 1117 Butterick Building, New York, N. Y.

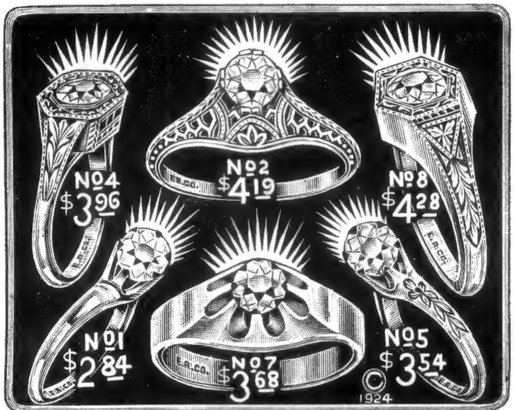
Dear Sir:

Please mail me without obligation full particulars on your practical money-making plan.

Name..............................

Street..............................

City.................... *State*....................



GET THIS WONDERFUL RING

IF YOU CAN TELL IT FROM A GENUINE DIAMOND SEND IT BACK

These Amazingly Beautiful CORODITE Gems match the scintilating beauty of GENUINE DIAMONDS in every way. They have the same gorgeous **blazing flash and dazzling play of living rainbow fire. Standing the terrific Acid Test** of direct comparison. Life time experts need all their experience to see any difference. Prove this yourself.

Make this Test **Wear a Genuine CORODITE and a Diamond side by side on the same finger.** If you and your friends can tell the difference **send it back,** you won't be out a penny. That's fair enough. If you keep the ring, price printed here is **all you pay.** Remember CORODITES alone **have the same facet cutting** as Genuine Stones.

No. 1	Ladies Solitaire 14K Gold Filled Ring - - - -	$2.84
No. 2	Ladies Pierced Filigree 4 Post Ring, Platinum effect -	$4.19
No. 4	Ladies Hand Carved Basket Ring, Platinum effect - -	$3.96
No. 5	Ladies Bridal Blossom Engraved Solitaire - - -	$3.54
No. 7	Mens Heavy Belcher 14K Gold Filled Ring - - - -	$3.68
No. 8	Mens Massive Hand Carved Hexagon Gypsy - - -	$4.28

Carat Size Gems. Beautiful Hand Carved and Engraved. Mountings of most modern design bearing an unqualified 20 year guarantee. Art Leather, Silk(Silk and Velvet Lined Gift Case **Free** with each ring.

SEND NO MONEY Keep your money right at home. Just send name, address and number of ring wanted and size as shown by slip of paper fitting end to end around finger joint and your ring will come by return mail. Deposit amount shown above with postman. You **do not risk a penny** as our **binding legal guarantee to refund your money in full** is attached to every ring we sell. **SEND TODAY.**

E. RICHWINE CO., Dept. 172, **19 West Jackson Blvd.**
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Sole Importers Genuine Corodite Gems

L C Smith & Bros

Save $38.80

Take advantage of the great saving we offer on the genuine world-famous **ball-bearihg, long wearing L. C. Smith Typewriter.** Late model machines, standard size, up-to-date in every way, at remarkably low prices.

SEND NO MONEY

TEN DAYS' FREE TRIAL

Test it thoroughly—no obligation

A YEAR TO PAY **LOW PRICES EASY TERMS**

Guaranteed Five Years

We do the most perfect and highest class job of rebuilding known to the typewriter industry. Our machines do perfect work and last for years and years. Just like new. The L. C. Smith is the easiest machine to operate and you can easily type your own letters. **Complete lessons** on typewriting, also our **5 Year Guarantee with every machine.**

FREE—Send today for **Free Booklet** of **Valuable Typewriter Information, Big Catalog** and our **Special Offer.**

SMITH TYPEWRITER SALES CO.
236-360 East Grand Avenue **Chicago, Illinois**

Antique and Modern Arms

Arrows	**$1.00** up	War medals	**$ 3.00** up
Zulu shields	**$8.50** "	Flint pistols	**$ 4.50** "
African spears	**$5.00** "	Blunderbusses	**$15.00** "
Dirks	**$5.00** "	Arrowheads	**.10** each

Illustrated reference catalog, 372 pages, issue 1922, mailed 50 cents. New Circular for 2 ct. stamp.

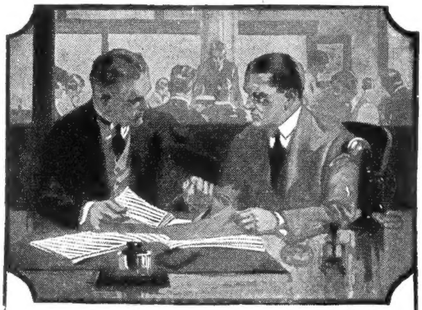
Established 1865

Francis Bannerman Sons, 501 Broadway, New York

POSITIONS OPEN

EARN $3,000 per year and up. RAILROADS SEEK TARIFF COMPILERS. Commercial Houses need men who understand freight tariffs. Easy to learn in 3 months spare time at home. Ordinary education is sufficient. *Paid Vacations. Travel Free.* Act now while opportunities are open. Send for FREE Traffic Club Membership Card and first lesson.

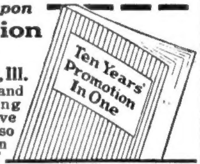
DEARBORN COLLEGE OF COMPILING
Suite E **525 South Dearborn Street, Chicago, Ill.**



Home-Study Business Courses

Do you want an important, high-salaried position? You can have one if you can do the work. LaSalle experts will show you how, guide you step by step to success and help solve your personal business problems. Our plan enables you to train during spare hours without interference with your present duties. Give us your name and address and mark with an "X" below the kind of position you want to fill. We will mail catalog and full particulars regarding our low cost monthly payment plan. Also our valuable book for ambitious men, "Ten Years' Promotion in One." Tear out, mark and mail the coupon today. No obligation to you. Let us prove to you how this step has helped thousands of ambitious men to real success.

Coupon


Ten Years' Promotion In One

LaSalle Extension University
Dept. 10367-R Chicago, Ill.

Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me.

☐ **Business Management:** Training for Official, Managerial, Sales and Departmental Executive positions.

☐ **Modern Salesmanship:** Training for position as Sales Executive, Salesman, Sales Coach or Trainer, Sales Promotion Manager, Manufacturers' Agent, Solicitor, and all positions in retail, wholesale or specialty selling.

☐ **Higher Accountancy:** Training for position as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.

☐ **Traffic Management—Foreign and Domestic:** Training for position as Railroad or Industrial Traffic Manager, Rate Expert, Freight Solicitor, etc.

☐ **Railway Station Management:** Training for position of Station Accountant, Cashier and Agent, Division Agent, etc.

☐ **Banking and Finance:** Training for executive positions in Banks and Financial Institutions.

☐ **Modern Foremanship and Production Methods:** Training for positions in Shop Management, such as that of Superintendent, General Foreman, Foreman, Sub-Foreman, etc.

☐ **Industrial Management Efficiency:** Training for positions in Works Management, Production Control, Industrial Engineering, etc.

☐ **Personnel and Employment Management:** Training in the position of Personnel Manager, Industrial Relations Manager, Employment Manager, and positions relating to Employee Service.

☐ **Modern Business Correspondence and Practice:** Training for position as Sales or Collection Correspondent, Sales Promotion Manager, Mail Sales Manager, Secretary, etc.

☐ **Law: Training for Bar: LL. B. Degree.**
☐ **Expert Bookkeeping.**
☐ **Business English.**
☐ **Commercial Law.**
☐ **Effective Speaking.**
☐ **C. P. A. Coaching.**
☐ **Commercial Spanish**

Name……………………………………………

Present Position ……………………………………

Address ……………………………………………

PAUL MEYLAN

Suppose Every One in Town Were Gossiping About You . . . .

What would you do? This problem worried young Dr. Arrowsmith and his wife. They found out that people were saying Dr. Arrowsmith was a drunkard and a gambler. Will this vicious gossip ruin his practise? Should he leave town or stay and fight? Every one who lives in a small town, or a large one, will want to read this true-to-life story. The only way you can get this story now is by subscribing to THE DESIGNER magazine in which it is appearing in serial form. Enter your subscription to-day.

"DR. MARTIN ARROWSMITH"
BY
SINCLAIR LEWIS
Famous Author of "Main Street" and "Babbitt"

THE DESIGNER

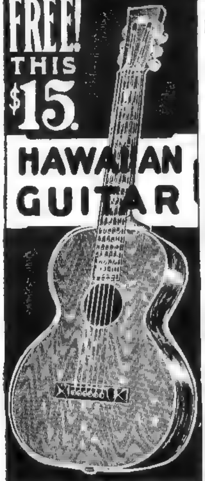
ON SALE AT ALL STANDARD-DESIGNER PATTERN COUNTERS
AND NEWS-STANDS. 15 CENTS A COPY—$1.50 A YEAR

YOU TOO CAN PLAY THE HAWAIIAN GUITAR

JUST AS THE HAWAIIANS DO!

PLAY ALL THE LATEST HITS

FREE! THIS $15. HAWAIIAN GUITAR



ONLY 4 MOTIONS used in playing the fascinating Hawaiian Guitar. Our native Hawaiian instructors teach you to master them quickly. Pictures show how. Everything explained clearly.

PLAY IN HALF HOUR After you get the 4 easy motions, you can play harmonious chords with very little practice. 40,000 students have learned to play in this easy, pleasant way.

EASY LESSONS The 52 printed lessons with a great many pictures make it easy to learn quickly. You don't have to know how to read notes. No previous musical knowledge necessary. You learn to play any kind of music, and pay as you play.

FREE GUITAR As a special offer to new students we give this full size, high grade instrument free of charge. It is sent at once without red tape or delay.

WRITE AT ONCE Send your name at once and let us tell you all about the 52 easy lessons and the free guitar. You have everything to gain. Don't put it off. A post card will do. Ask for new special offer and easy terms.

Special courses on Violin, Tenor-Banjo, Banjo-Ukulele and Ukulele

First Hawaiian Conservatory of Music, Inc.

233 Broadway (Woolworth Bldg.,
Dept. 84, New York, N. Y.

Make 'em Laugh!

$1.79
Pat. Pending

GET one of these little beauties right now, and **protect yourself** against hold-up thugs, rowdies, etc., and at the same time it serves as the best novelty cigarette case ever invented.

Made exactly like the **real thing!** Just pull the trigger, back flies the lid showing a full package of your cigarettes. **Lots of fun** amusing your friends and at the same time useful and a **great protector.** Made of light weight metal, gun metal finish, 4¾ inches long. Sold exclusively by us. Order at once, **supply limited.** Special introductory price . . . . **$1.79 each**

PAY POSTMAN on delivery our price plus postage. **Money back if not satisfied.**

PATHFINDER COMPANY
Dept. JH4B **534 Sixth Avenue** **New York**

TYPEWRITER PRICES REDUCED ON ALL STANDARD MAKES

FREE TRIAL

Big bargains, easy payments on *late model* Underwoods, Royals, L. C. Smiths, Remingtons, etc.—perfect machines expertly remanufactured by the "Young Process" guaranteed like new for five years. Shipped direct from our factory to you at big saving.

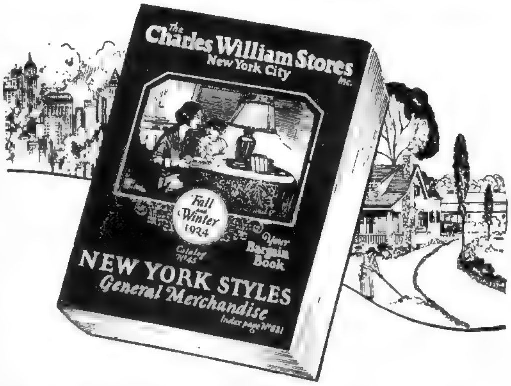
Our big illustrated catalog sent *free and without obligation* to buy. Write for your today.

Young Typewriter Co., DEPT. 152-A 634 W. Randolph St **Chicago, Ill.**

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG

We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 401-J Romax Bldg., New York.

The Charles William Stores Inc.
New York City



New York Styles and General Merchandise

WHATEVER your needs, you are almost sure to find them in this splendid new book—and at a price that will save you much. For months, our buyers have been working on this new book—working to give you the best that the market affords in practically everything you use or wear—at the least cost to you.

Just think of the many things you are going to need soon! A new suit or coat for the women of the family? There are 48 pages of them in the new catalog. Shoes for the children? You can select from more than 125 styles. A coat for Dad? You are sure to find one he'll like from the 58 different models and patterns shown in our bargain book. Then, too, you will find practically everything that you use in your home, on the farm, or on your car.

We Guarantee to Please You

Remember, too, that everything The Charles William Stores sells is guaranteed to please you or we will return your money. Customers everywhere endorse this liberal policy.

We have confidence in the quality of our merchandise; confidence in our ability to fit you, and we know that we can ship your order promptly. And, this confidence—this knowledge—is born of facts, for otherwise our liberal guarantee would be impossible. Ask any banker anywhere to tell you of the responsibility of The Charles William Stores.

Clip and mail the coupon below TODAY

THE CHARLES WILLIAM STORES, *Inc.*
117 Stores Building, New York City

Please send me FREE a copy of your General Catalog for Fall and Winter.

Name ....

Street ....

Town and State ....

RAYMOND THAYER

"But you don't know me, sir."

"Ah, but I do, Lady. Thy fair face betrays thy maskèd eyes. Thou'rt none other than the charming Sally of my dreams!"

The simplest, safest aid to natural beauty

MOST WOMEN know that daily cleansing with pure soap and water is indispensable if one is to achieve and maintain a clear, healthy skin. Indeed, this, together with good health, constitutes the only sure foundation for a really beautiful complexion.

But many women do not yet realize that soap's *only* function for the skin is to *cleanse*. Magical promises of cures or transformations cannot be carried out by any soap, whatever its ingredients or price.

For instance, if artificial coloring matter, medicaments or heavy perfumes could add anything to the beneficial qualities of pure soap, we would have put them into Ivory Soap long ago, for our aim has always been to make, in Ivory, the finest possible soap for the skin.

But no! Ivory is, and will always be, simply pure *soap*—white, mild, gentle, delicately fragrant, *safe!*

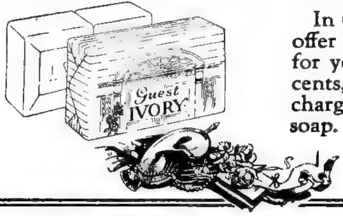
The gentle stimulation of a face-bath with Ivory and warm water, followed by rinsing and a dash of cool or cold water, brings fresh color—the natural glow of cleanliness. If your skin is dry, use a little pure cold cream afterwards.

In Guest Ivory, designed for slim feminine fingers, we offer you genuine Ivory Soap in a dainty size especially for your washstand. Guest Ivory's modest price, five cents, is not a measure of its value, for if we were to charge you a dollar, we could give you no finer, purer soap.

PROCTER & GAMBLE

IVORY SOAP

99 44/100% PURE IT FLOATS



© 1924, by The Procter & Gamble Co., Cincinnati

Adventure

Oct 20 1924
Vol XLIX No 2

THE DEAD-LINE

A Complete Novel
by W C Tuttle

Author of "Sun-Dog Loot," "Rustlers' Roost," etc.

JACK HARTWELL'S place was not of sufficient importance in Lo Lo Valley to be indicated by a brand name. It was a little four-room, rough-lumber and tar-paper shack, half buried in a clump of cottonwoods on the bank of Slow Elk Creek.

The house had been built several years before by a man named Morgan, who had the mistaken idea that a nester might be welcome on the Lo Lo range. He had moved in quietly, built his shack, and—then the riders from Marsh Hartwell's Arrow outfit had seen his smoke.

Whether or not Marsh Hartwell legally owned the property made no difference; he claimed it. And few men cared to dispute Marsh Hartwell. At any rate, it was proved that a nester was not welcome on the Arrow.

It was an August afternoon. Only a slight breeze moved the dry leaves of the cottonwoods, and the air was resonant with the hum of insects. Molly Hartwell, Jack Hartwell's wife, stood on the unshaded front steps of the house, looking down across the valley, which was hazy with the heat waves.

Mrs. Hartwell was possibly twenty years of age, tall, slender; a decided brunette of the Spanish type, although there was no Spanish blood in her ancestry. She was the kind of woman that women like to say mean things about; and try to make themselves believe them.

The married men of the Lo Lo mentally compared her with their women-folk; while the single men, most of them bashful, hard-riding cowpunchers, avoided her, and hoped she'd be at the next dance.

Jack Hartwell did not wave at her as he rode in out of the hills and dismounted at the little corral beside the creek. He unsaddled, turned his sweat-marked sorrel into the corral and hung his saddle on the fence.

Jack Hartwell was a few years older than his wife; a thin-waisted, thin-faced young man with an unruly mop of blond hair and a freckled nose. His wide, blue eyes were

Copyright, 1924, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain. All rights reserved.

troubled, as he squinted toward the house and kicked off his chaps.

He could not see his wife, but he knew that she was waiting for him, waiting for the news that he was bringing to her. After a few moments of indecision he shrugged his shoulders and walked around the house to her.

She was sitting down in the doorway now, and he halted beside her, his thumbs hooked over the heavy cartridge belt around his waist.

"It's hot," he said wearily.

"Yes, it's hot," she said. "There hasn't been much breeze today."

"Water is gettin' kinda low, Molly. Several of the springs ain't runnin' more than a trickle."

"We need rain."

Neither of them spoke now, as they looked down across the valley. Winged grasshoppers crackled about the duty yard, and several hornets buzzed up and down the side of the house, as if seeking an entrance. Finally the woman looked up at him and he moved uneasily.

"Yeah, it's him—Eph King."

There was bitterness in Jack Hartwell's voice, which he did not try to conceal.

A flash of triumph came into the woman's eyes, and she turned back to her contemplation of the hills. Her husband looked down at her, shaking his head slowly.

"Molly, it's goin' to mean —— in these hills."

"Is it?"

She did not seem to mind.

"They've drawn a dead-line now," he said slowly, "and there has been some shootin'. They've sent for the outfits down in the south end, and they'll be here tonight."

"Well, we won't be in it," she said flatly. "It means nothing to us."

"Don't it?"

Jack squinted hard at her, but she did not look up.

"No. The law has decided that a sheep has the same right as a cow. The cattlemen of the Lo Lo do not legally own all this valley."

"Mebbe not—" Jack shook his head wearily—"but they hold it, Molly."

"Well," she laughed shortly, scornfully, "you are not a cattleman. You've got nothing to fight for."

"No-o-o?"

She sprang to her feet, her eyes flashing.

"Well, have you?" she demanded. "Your own people have turned you down. Your own father cursed you for marrying a daughter of Eph King. You wasn't good enough to even work for him; so he gave you this!" She flung out her arms in a gesture of contempt. "Is this worth fighting for?"

Jack Hartwell bit his lip for a moment and the ghost of a smile passed his thin lips.

"It ain't worth much, is it, Molly? Still, it was worth so much that——"

"That they killed the man who took possession of it," she finished angrily.

"Yeah, they killed him, Molly. Morgan was a fool. He had a chance to go away, but he would rather fight it out."

"He was a friend of my father."

"Yeah, I know it, Molly. But that has nothing to do with us."

"Did you see the sheep?"

"Yeah. I went as far as the dead-line, Molly. The hills are full of sheep. They were comin' down the draws like the gray water of a cloud-burst, spreadin' all over the flats. As far back as yuh can see, just sheep and dust."

"Are they on Arrow range?"

"On the upper edge. The punchers threw 'em back about half a mile, but I dunno." Jack shook his head. "There's so many of 'em."

"Dad has thirty thousand head," she said slowly. "Or he did have that many before——"

"Before yuh ran away to marry me," finished Jack.

"I went willingly, Jack."

"Oh, I know it, Molly." He turned and threw an arm across her shoulder. "You've had a rotten deal, girl. I wish for your sake that it could be undone. I didn't know that there was so much hate between your dad and mine. I knew that they were not friends, but—well, I know now."

"Your father drove my father out of this valley."

"But that was years ago, Molly."

"And branded him a thief," bitterly.

"Yeah, I reckon that's right. It never was proved nor disproved, Molly. We've known for years that he was goin' to try and shove sheep across the range into Lo Lo. He swore that he would sheep us out. There ain't been a time in two years that men haven't ridden the upper ranges, watchin' for such a thing.

"There's a man livin' in Kiopo Cañon,

whose job is to watch the other slope. I dunno how it was he didn't warn us; and I dunno how your father ever found out that we were goin' to hold the roundup two weeks ahead of time. He sure picked the right time. If we'd 'a' known it, he'd never got his sheep up over the divide."

"You say 'we,' " said Molly slowly. "Are you one of them? After they have turned you out, are you still one of them?"

Jack turned away, shading his eyes with one hand, as he studied the hills.

"I've always been a cowman," he said slowly. "I've been raised to hate sheep and yuh can't change a man in a day."

"What have the cattlemen done for you, Jack?"

Jack did not reply.

A MAN was riding out of the hills on a jaded horse. He rode slowly up to them, a bronzed, wiry cowboy, with sun-red eyes and a sweat-streaked face.

"Hello, Spiers," said Jack.

"G'd afternoon, folks. Hotter'n ——, ain't it."

"Crawl off and rest your feet," invited Jack.

"No, thank yuh. I jist rode down thisaway to tell yuh that there's a meetin' at the Arrow t'night. The boys from the other end of the range'll be there by evenin'."

"Did my dad send yuh after me, Spiers?"

"No-o-o, he didn't," Spiers shifted in his saddle nervously. "But I've always liked yuh, Jack; and I kinda thought yuh might want t' come. It's a cattlemen's meetin', yuh know."

"And he's a cattleman," said Molly dryly.

Spiers flushed slightly and picked up his reins.

"Well, I'll be ridin' on. S'long, folks."

He swung his horse around and rode on into the hills, without looking back.

"Oh, I hate that man!" exclaimed Molly angrily.

"Spiers is all right," defended Jack calmly.

"All right! He's a gunman, a killer."

"Prob'ly. He's dad's foreman; been his foreman for years."

"And does your dad's dirty work."

Jack sighed deeply and shook his head.

"There's no use arguin' with yuh, Molly."

"Spiers killed Jim Morgan."

"Well, Morgan had an even break. He —Say, how did you know that Spiers killed Morgan?"

"I didn't."

Molly turned away and went into the house.

Jack went back to the corral, where he leaned on the fence and tried to decide what to do. Naturally his sympathies were with the cattleman. He had been born and raised in the Lo Lo Valley, steeped in the lore of the rangeland; a top-hand cowboy at sixteen.

He had known Molly King when they were both attending the little cow-town school at Totem City, when the fathers of both were struggling for supremacy in the valley. Then came a day, when accusations were hurled at Eph King and his outfit. He was accused of wholesale cattle stealing, but no arrests were made. The cattlemen, headed by Marsh Hartwell, bought him out at a fair price and sent him out of the country.

But whether through his ill-gotten gains or through his own ability, Eph King became the sheep king of the Sunland Basin, a vast land to the north of Lo Lo, a land that was a constant threat to Lo Lo.

But there was one thing in the cattlemen's favor: The sheep would have to come through the pass at the head of Kiopo Cañon, where old Ed Barber kept daily watch of the slopes which led off into Sunland.

Jack Hartwell again met Molly King in Medicine Tree, which was the home town of the King family. It was circus day. The recognition had been mutual and old scores were forgotten. They spent the day together, like a couple of kids out of school, drinking pink lemonade and feeding peanuts to the one elephant. It was not a big circus.

For several months after that Jack Hartwell found excuses to go to Medicine Tree. Then one day he came back to the Arrow ranch with a wife. They had eloped. Big Marsh Hartwell listened to their explanations, his face blue with suppressed anger, while Mrs. Hartwell, a frail little, gray-haired woman, with pleading blue eyes, clutched her apron with both blue-veined hands and watched her husband anxiously.

"So that's it, eh?" Marsh Hartwell nodded slowly, his eyes almost shut. "You went over there and married her, did yuh. You married Eph King's daughter."

"Father!"

Ma Hartwell put a hand on his arm, but he shook it off.

"And yuh brought her back here, eh? Now what are yuh goin' to do?"

"Why, I thought—" began Jack.

"No, yuh didn't think! That's the trouble. You know —— well that a King ain't welcome in this valley. You've put yourself on a level with them. The son-in-law of a shepherd! You can't stay here. Don't you know that for years we've spent money to keep the King family out of this valley? And here yuh bring one in on us."

"All right," Jack had replied angrily. "We'll go back to 'em."

"No, yuh won't. You move your stuff over to the old Morgan place. I'll make yuh a present of it. Mebbe yuh can live it down—I dunno; but yuh can't stay here on the Arrow."

Jack thought all this over as he leaned on the corral fence. They had lived there less than a year. People avoided them. Molly had no women friends. To them she was the sheep woman, although they were forced to admit that she did not contaminate the air. Jack took her to dances and tried to make her one of the crowd, but without success.

And the men were not friendly to Jack. He had been one of them; one of a crowd of wild-riding, rollicking cowboys, who drank, played poker and danced with reckless abandon. In fact, Jack had been a sort of ring-leader of the gang.

He missed all this more than any one knew. But most of all he missed the home life of the Arrow ranch.

His sister and her husband, Bill Brownlee, lived at the Arrow. Brownlee hated the sheep even worse, if such a thing were possible, than did Marsh Hartwell. There were three cowboys employed:

Three gunmen, as Molly had called them.

"Honey" Wier, a wide-mouthed, flat-faced cowboy, who hailed from "Alberty, by gosh," "Cloudy" McKay, a dour-faced, trouble expecter from Arizona, and "Chet" Spiers, the foreman, composed the hired element of the Arrow. And Lo Lo Valley respected them for their ability. Marsh Hartwell knew cowpunchers, and in these three men he had ability plus.

And Jack Hartwell, as he leaned on the corral fence, knew down deep in his heart that he could not remain neutral. It would be impossible. He must decide quickly, too. If he did not attend that meeting, the cattlemen would take it for granted that he was against them. Spiers had given him no chance to vacillate.

FAR back in the hills sounded the report of a rifle. Jack lifted his head, and as he did so he thought he caught a flash of color back on the side of a hill. For several minutes he watched the spot, but there was nothing other than the sage brush and the dancing haze.

"Seein' things," he told himself, but to make sure he walked back up the brush-lined stream, keeping out of sight of that certain spot. But he found nothing, and came back to the corral, where he busied himself for an hour or so, putting in a couple of new posts.

He needed physical action, and he worked swiftly in the blazing sun. Then he flung himself down in the shade and smoked innumerable cigarets, still wrestling with himself. The sun went down before he walked back to the house. Molly was putting their supper on the table, but he had no appetite.

"I heard a shot a while ago," she told him, and he nodded grimly.

"You'll prob'ly hear a lot more before it's over, Molly."

He sat down at the table, but shoved his plate aside.

"I'm not hungry," he said slowly. "I've fought it all out with myself today, Molly. It's been a —— of a fight."

"Fought out what?"

She swallowed dryly, almost choking.

"Just what to do. I'm goin' to that meetin' at the Arrow tonight."

She got to her feet, staring down at him.

"You going to that meeting? Why, you won't be welcome. Don't be a fool, Jack. They know you won't be there."

"I'll be there," Jack nodded slowly, but did not look at her. "Molly, you married a cowpuncher, not a sheepherder. This is my country. I—I reckon I hate sheep as bad as anybody around here, and I've got to help keep 'em out."

"You have?" She sat down and stared across the table at him. "After what they've done to us?"

"Yeah—even after that."

"You'd fight against—me?"

"You? Why, bless yore heart, Molly; it ain't you."

"It's my father, my folks. He never did you any harm."

"Well," Jack smiled grimly, "he never had a good chance. Yuh must remember that I haven't seen him since I was a kid. I had to steal yuh, girl. He'd 'a' prob'ly killed me, if he knew."

Molly shook her head quickly.

"I think he knew, Jack. In fact, I'm sure of it."

"How do you know?" He squinted closely at her. "We didn't know it was goin' to happen until we met that day, the day we ran away to get married. And you never seen him since."

"Oh, I don't know."

She got to her feet and walked to the kitchen door. He watched her for a while, and then got up from the table, picking up his hat. Quickly she turned and walked back to the table.

"Jack, I forbid you to go there tonight."

"Well," he smiled softly at her, "I'm sorry yuh feel that way about it, Molly, but I'm goin', thassall."

"Are you?" Her eyes blazed with anger. "Well, go ahead. I may not be here when you come back."

"Uh-huh?"

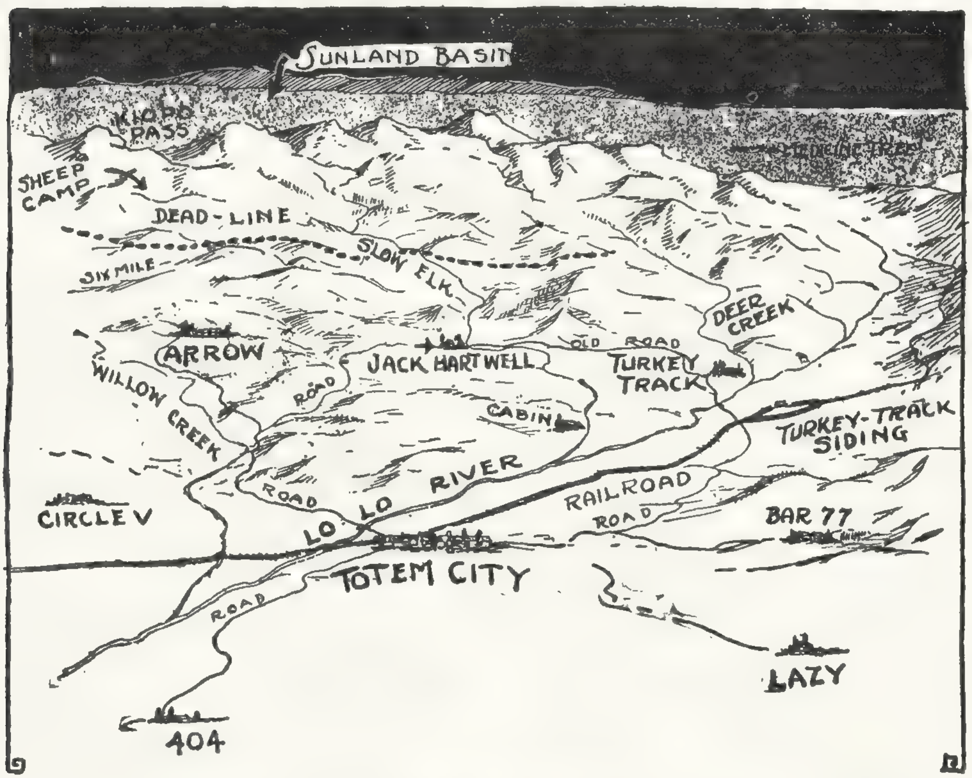
He turned his sombrero around several times, as if trying to control himself.

"Well," he looked up at her wistfully, "I may not come back, yuh know."

"Why—why do you say that, Jack?"

"Well, I don't want to come back, unless I'm sure you'll be home."

She stared at him as he went past her and walked down to the corral, where he saddled his horse, drew on his chaps and rode away toward the Arrow. She had not told him whether or not she would be home when he returned, and he had not told her good-by.


SUNLAND BASIN
KIOPO PASS
HANGING TREE
SHEEP CAMP
DEAD-LINE
SIX MILE
SLOW ELK
DEER CREEK
ARROW
OLD ROAD
JACK HARTWELL
TURKEY TRACK
WILLOW CREEK
ROAD
CABIN
TURKEY-TRACK SIDING
RIVER
ROAD
LO LO
RAILROAD
CIRCLE V
ROAD
BAR 77
TOTEM CITY
ROAD
LAZY
404

JACK rode out over the trail that led to the Arrow ranch-house three miles away. He was in no hurry, and drew up his horse after he was hidden from the house. He wondered if Molly would be foolish enough to ride back into the hills to her father. Her horse and saddle were at the corral.

He knew that it might be dangerous for her to ride across the dead-line at night. She wore men's garb for riding purposes. He turned his horse around and rode back to where he could watch the house. It was not his nature to spy upon his wife, but he did not want her to run into danger foolishly.

He did not have long to wait. A man came through the fringe of brush along the creek, going cautiously. Once he stopped and looked intently at the spot where Jack was hidden. Then he went swiftly toward the house, coming in at the opposite side.

Jack mounted his horse and spurred back along the trail. He could not recognize this man, but his very actions stamped him as dangerous. Jack dismounted at the rear of the house and went around to the front, where he stopped. Voices were coming from the other side of the house. Silently as possible he went to the corner. Molly was standing with her back to him, looking at something in her hands, while the man stood beside her, looking down toward the corral.

"Company came, eh?" said Jack softly.

Molly and the stranger turned quickly. With a quick intake of breath, Molly flung her hands behind her. The stranger was a middle-aged man, unkempt, with a face covered with black stubble. His clothes were dirty, torn. The butt of a six-shooter stuck out of the waist-band of his overalls.

He merely squinted at Jack and looked at Molly. It was evident that he did not know Jack, who came closer, holding out his hand to Molly.

"Give me that letter, Molly," ordered Jack.

"I will not!"

Her teeth clicked angrily, as she faced him.

He walked up, ignoring the man, grasped her by the shoulder and whirled her around. The action was unlooked for and she threw out one hand to catch her balance. Quick as a flash Jack grabbed at the hand which held the letter, but all he got was a corner of the paper.

"Quit that!" snapped the stranger, grasping Jack by the arm. "Don'tcha try——"

He whirled Jack around and got a left-hand smash full in the jaw, which sent him to his knees, spitting blood. But the blow was not heavy enough to do more than daze him, and as he straightened up he jerked the six-shooter from his waist.

But Jack was looking for this, and his bullet crashed into the stranger's arm between elbow and wrist, leaving the man staring up at him, unable to do more than mouth a curse.

Molly had been leaning back against the side of the house, her face white with fright, but now she sped into the kitchen, slamming the door behind her. The stranger got to his feet, holding his arm with his left hand, and looked around.

"Yo're from the sheep outfits, ain't yuh?" asked Jack.

"That's my business." The stranger was not a bit meek.

"It's a —— of a business," observed Jack. "Who was that letter from?"

"Mebbe yuh think yuh can find out, eh?"

"All right. Now you mosey back where yuh came from; *sabe?* If I ever catch yuh around here again, I'll not shoot at yore arm. Now vamoose *pronto.*"

The man turned and went swiftly back past the corral, where he disappeared through the brush. A few moments later he came out on to the side of a hill, where he lost no time in putting distance between himself and the ranch.

Jack watched him disappear and went to the kitchen door. It was locked. For a while he stood there, wondering what to do. He had lost the piece he had torn from the corner of the letter, but now he found it on the ground.

It had torn diagonally across the corner, and on it were only three words, written in lead-pencil:

Find out what——

Just the three words. For a long time he studied them, before the full import of them struck him. He walked to the front door, but found it locked. Then he went back, mounted his horse and rode back toward the Arrow. It was growing dark now, and he felt sure that the stranger would not come back. He was in need of medical attention, and Jack felt that he would lose no time in getting back to his own crowd.

Jack took the tiny piece of paper from his pocket and looked it over again.

"It's from her father," he told himself. "Find out what? Find out somethin' about the cattlemen, I wonder? My ——, is my wife a spy?"

He straightened in his saddle, as past

events flashed through his mind. Molly had known that there was a lookout in Kiopo Cañon. He remembered that Honey Wier had spoken in her presence of old Ed Barber, the keeper of the Kiopo Pass, who drew a salary for sitting up there, watching for sheep.

She also knew that the fall roundup was to be held at this time. Had she written this to her father, he wondered? She had plenty of chances, when she went for the mail. And she had intimated that her father knew she was going to marry him.

"Is she standin' all this for her father?" he asked himself. "Did she marry me just to give her father a chance to get even with the Arrow?"

He tried to argue himself out of the idea, but the tiny, triangular piece of paper, with the three written words, was something that he could not deny. It was after dark when he rode in at the Arrow. There were twelve horses tied to the low fence in front of the ranch-house. A yellow glow showed through the heavy window curtains of the living room.

Jack did not stop to knock on the front door, but walked right in. The room was full of men, hazy with smoke. They had been arguing angrily as he entered, but now they were still.

His father was sitting at the back of the room, in the center, while the others were facing him. There were Cliff Vane, owner of the Circle V, and his two cowboys, Bert Allen and "Skinner" Close; Sam Hodges, the crippled owner of the Bar 77, with Jimmy Healey, Paul Dazey and Gene Hill; Old Frank Hall, who owned the 404, his son Tom and three punchers.

"Slim" De Larimore, the saturnine-faced owner of the Turkeytrack brand, a horse outfit. Three of his punchers were scattered around the room. Seated near Marsh Hartwell was "Sudden" Smithy, the sheriff, who owned the Lazy S outfit. Near him sat "Sunshine" Gallagher, his deputy, the prize pessimist of Lo Lo Valley.

Near the dining-room door, Spiers sat hunched against the wall, and near him was Brownlee, Jack's brother-in-law. Jack closed the door behind him and looked quickly around the room. Marsh Hartwell squinted closely at Jack. It was the first time that Jack had been in the Arrow ranch-house since his father had told him he would not be welcome any longer.

De Larimore had evidently been talking, as he started in again to explain something, but Marsh Hartwell silenced him with a motion of his hand, looking intently at Jack.

"Was there somethin' yuh wanted?"

Marsh Hartwell's voice was cold and impersonal. He might have been speaking to a total stranger instead of to his own son.

"Somethin' I wanted?" said Jack puzzled. "I came to the meetin', thass all."

"I asked him to," said Spiers. "I didn't think he'd come."

"Yuh can't never tell about some folks." Thus Sunshine Gallagher, grinning.

"Thank yuh, Sunshine," said Jack easily.

"Oh ——, yore welcome, I'm sure."

"What did you expect to do at this meetin'?" queried Marsh Hartwell.

"For one thing," said Jack coldly, "I didn't expect to be insulted. I know I'm an outsider, but I own a few cattle."

Some one laughed and Jack turned his head quickly, but every one was straight faced.

"Oh, ——, you fellers make me tired!" roared old Sam Hodges, hammering his cane on the floor. His white beard twitched angrily. "Why don'tcha let the kid alone. What if he did marry the daughter of a sheepherder? By ——, that ain't so terribly awful, is it?"

He glared around as if daring any one to challenge his argument.

"Are any of you fellers pure? Ha, ha, ha, ha! By ——, I could tell a few things about most of yuh, if I wanted to. I've seen Jack's wife, and I'll rise right up and proclaim that they raise some —— sweet lookin' females in the sheep country. Set down, Jack. Yo're a cowman, son, and this here is a cowman's meetin'. We need trigger fingers, too, by ——! And if m' memory don't fail me, you've got a good one."

"But—" began the sheriff.

"But ——!" snorted the old man. "Don't 'but' me! You —— holier-than-thou! Smithy, some day you'll make me mad and I'll tell yuh right out what I know about yuh. Oh, I know all of yuh. I'm a ——ed old cripple, and the law protects me from violence, so hop to it. Start hornin' into me, will yuh? I've lived here since Lo Lo Valley was a high peak, and I'm competent to write a biography of every

——ed one of yuh. And some of it would have to be written on asbestos paper. Set down, Jack Hartwell; yo're interruptin' the meetin'."

Jack sat down near the door, hunched on his heels. Old Sam Hodges had come to his rescue at a critical time, and he inwardly blessed the old cripple. Hodges had been a cripple as long as Jack could remember, and his tongue was vitriolic. He was educated, refined, when he cared to be, which was not often. But in spite of the fact that he cursed every one, the men of Lo Lo Valley listened to his advice.

"Well, let's get on with the meetin'," said Vane impatiently. "You were talkin', Slim."

"And that's all he was doin'," said Sunshine. "Slim is jist like a dictionary. He talks a little about this and a little about that, and the —— stuff don't connect. What we want is an agreement on some move, it seems to me."

"Sunshine's got the right idea," agreed Hodges. "Too much talk. If anybody has a real suggestion, let 'em outline it. You ought to have one, Hartwell."

Marsh Hartwell shook his head.

"It will be impossible to wipe them out now. The only thing to do will be to make a solid dead-line and hold 'em where they are until the feed plays out and they have to go back. The feed ain't none too good up there now, and if it don't rain they can't stay long."

"How many men will it take to hold that line, Marsh?" asked Vane.

"They're spread over a two-mile front now. Figure it out. They've got about twenty-five herders, all armed with rifles. I look for 'em to spread plumb across the range, and the —— himself couldn't stop 'em from tricklin' in."

"Which ruins the idea of a solid dead-line," said Hodges dryly. "Who has a worse idea than that?"

THE sheriff got to his feet, but before he could state his proposition there came a noise at the front door. Jack sprang to his feet and flung the door open, while in came Honey Wier, half-carrying, half-dragging old Ed Barber, who had been the keeper of the Kiopo Pass.

The old man was blood-stained, clothes half torn from his body, his face chalky in the light of the lamp. One of the men sprang up and let Honey place the old man in an easy chair, while the rest crowded around, questioning, wondering what had happened to him.

"I found him about a mile from Kiopo," panted Honey. "His cabin had been burned. They shot him, but he managed to hide away in the brush. I reckon he lost his mind and came crawlin' out on to the side hill. I got shot at, too, when I was bringin' him in, but they missed me."

"How bad is he hurt?" asked Hartwell.

"Kinda bad, I reckon. He talked to me a while ago."

Vane produced a flask and gave the old man a drink. The strong liquor brought a flush to his cheeks and he tried to grin.

"Good stuff!" he whispered wheezingly. "I ain't dead yet. Need a doctor, I reckon."

"I'll get one right away," said one of the cowboys, and bolted out after his horse.

"Who shot yuh, Ed?" asked Hartwell.

"I dunno, Marsh. They sneaked up on me, roped me tight and brought in the sheep next day. I heard 'em goin' past the cabin. They knowed what I was there for. One of 'em told me. They knowed that the roundup was on, too. I managed to fight m'self out of them ropes, but it was too late.

"The sheep had all gone past. Some of them men was comin' back toward the cabin and they seen me makin' my getaway. I didn't have no gun. They hit me a couple of times, but I crawled into a mesquite and they missed findin' me."

"Then they burned the cabin," said Honey angrily.

Marsh Hartwell scowled thoughtfully, as he turned away from the old man.

"What do yuh think of it, Marsh?" asked Hodges.

"I think there's a spy in Lo Lo Valley."

"A spy?" queried the sheriff.

"Yeah, a spy. How did they know that Ed Barber lived in Kiopo Cañon to watch for sheep? How did they know that we'd hold our fall roundup this early in the season? By ——, somebody told 'em, some sneakin' spy!"

Marsh Hartwell turned and looked straight at Jack. It was a look filled with meaning, and nearly every man in the room interpreted it fully. Still Jack did not flinch, as their eyes met. Some one swore softly.

"There's only one answer to that," said De Larimore. "Show us the spy, Hartwell. This is a time of war."

Marsh Hartwell shook his head slowly and turned back to his seat.

"Things like that must be proven," said Hodges. "It ain't a thing that yuh can take snap judgment on."

"We better put Ed between the blankets," suggested Honey Wier. "He's got to be in shape for the doctor to work on when he comes, so I reckon we'll take him down to the bunkhouse, Marsh."

The boss of the Arrow nodded, and three men assisted the wounded man from the room. Jack turned to Gene Hill,

"Have they got any men on the dead-line now, Gene?" he asked softly.

Hill was a long-nosed, watery-eyed sort of person, generally very affable, but now he seemed to draw into his shell.

"Better ask Marsh Hartwell," he said slowly. "I ain't in no position to pass out information."

There was no mistaking the inference in Hill's reply. Jack turned and walked to the door, where he faced the crowd, his hand on the door-knob.

"I came here tonight to throw in with yuh," he said hoarsely. "I'm as much of a cattleman as any of yuh here tonight, and —— knows I hate sheep as bad as any of yuh. I had a gun to help yuh fight against the sheep men.

"But I know how yuh feel toward me. My own father thinks I've done him an injury. You think I'm a spy. Well, —— yuh, go ahead and think all yuh want to! From now on I don't have to show allegiance to either side. I'm neither a cattleman nor a sheepman. I'll mind my own business, *sabe?* You've drawn a dead-line against the sheep; I'll draw one against both of yuh. You know where my ranch-lines run? All right, keep off. Now, yuh can all go to ——!"

He yanked the door open and slammed it behind him. For several moments the crowd was silent. Then old Sam Hodges laughed joyfully and hammered on the floor with his cane.

"Good for the kid!" he exploded. "By ——, I'm for him! He told yuh all to go to ——, didn't he? Told me to go with yuh. But I wouldn't do it, nossir. Catch me with this gang? Huh! Draw a dead-line, will he? Ha, ha, ha, ha! Betcha forty dollars he'll hold it, too. Hartwell, you are an ass!"

Marsh Hartwell flushed hotly, but did not reply. He knew better than to cross old Hodges, who chuckled joyfully over his evil-smelling pipe.

"If I had a boy like Jack, I'll be —— if I'd turn him down because his wife's father favored mutton instead of beef," he continued. "Now that we've all agreed that Marsh Hartwell is seventeen kinds of a —— fool, let's get back to the business at hand."

Marsh Hartwell glared at Hodges, his jaw muscles jerking.

"If you wasn't a cripple, Sam——"

"But I am, Marsh." The old man chuckled throatily, as he sucked on his pipe. "I wish I wasn't, but I am."

"All of which don't settle our questions," observed Slim Larimore impatiently.

"No, and it don't look to me like there was any use of talkin' any further."

Thus Frank Hall, of the 404, a dumpy, little old cowman, with an almost-round head. He got to his feet, as if the meeting was over.

"There's only one thing to do: Shove every —— rider we've got along that dead-line and kill every sheep and sheepherder that crosses it."

"That looks like the only reasonable thing to do," nodded Marsh Hartwell, looking around the room. "Are we all agreed on that?"

Sudden Smithy, the sheriff, got to his feet.

"Gents," he said slowly. "I can't say yes to that. You all know that I've sworn to uphold the law; and the law has given the sheep the same right as cattle. Legally, we don't own but a small portion of Lo Lo range; morally, we do. I'm as much of a cowman as you fellers, but first of all, I'm the sheriff."

"That's all right," said Hartwell. "You're not against us, Sudden?"

"O-o-oh, —— no! I'm just showin' yuh that it won't be my vote that turns —— loose in these hills. And she's goin' to be ——, boys. Eph King is a fighter. He shoved that mass of sheep over Kiopo Pass, and the —— himself ain't goin' to be able to stop him, until every sheepherder is put out of commission and the sheep travelin' back down the slopes into Sunland Basin."

"And King's no fool," growled Bill

Brownlee. "He prob'ly ain't got no central camp, where we might ride in and bust 'em up quick. Every sheepherder goes it alone. King is prob'ly back there somewhere, directin' 'em."

"I sure like to notch my sight on him," said Cloudy McKay of the Arrow. "I got a bullet so close to my ear today that it plumb raised a blister. And any of you fellers that ride that dead-line better look out. Them shepherds lay close in the brush, and they can shoot, don'tcha forget it. Our best bet is to leave our broncs in a safe place, and play Injun."

"There's wisdom there," nodded Sam Hodges. "Eph King hasn't got ordinary sheepherders in charge of that outfit. He can hire trigger fingers and pay 'em their price. He's got more men up there right now than we can throw against him, and he's ready for battle.

"We better shove our men in close to that line before daylight, Hartwell. Spread 'em out, hide 'em in the brush. It looks —— nice to see a long string of mounted punchers, but a man on a horse up there will prove that he's a cattleman, a legitimate target for a shepherd. My idea is: Fight 'em with their own medicine."

"Suits me fine." Old Frank Hall picked up his hat. "We're too shy on men to make targets out of 'em. That's the best idea we've had, so let's go. How's everybody fixed for ammunition?"

A check of the cartridge belts showed that every man had enough for his immediate needs.

"I'll throw a chuck wagon into Six-Mile Gulch," stated Hartwell, "and we can feed in relays. If this lasts very long, we can throw another into the head of Brush Cañon; so that we won't have to draw the men too far away from the line.

"Smithy, when yuh go back to Totem, tell Jim Hork to wire Medicine Tree or Palm Lake for ca'tridges. Tell him to get plenty of thirty-thirties, forty-five seventies and a slough of forty-fours and forty-fives. If he can get us fifty pounds of dynamite, we'll take that, too. That's all, I reckon."

THE crowd of men filed out to their horses, where they mounted and rode away into the hills. Marsh Hartwell stood in the doorway of the ranch-house, bulking big in the yellow light, and watched them ride away. He turned back into the smoky room and squinted at his wife, who stood just inside the room, one hand still holding the half-open dining-room door.

For several moments they looked at each other closely. Then she released the door and came toward him.

"Marsh, I heard what was said to Jack," she said softly. "I was just outside that door."

"Well?"

"You drove him away from here."

"He drove himself away, Mother. When he married that——"

"He came to help you. After what you had done to him, he came to help you, Marsh. Blood is thicker than water."

"Not his blood! Came to help me? More likely he came to see what he could hear."

"Marsh! Do you think that Jack——?"

"Well, somebody did. I tell you, there's a dirty spy around here."

"Marsh Hartwell!"

The old lady came closer and put a hand on his arm, but he did not look at her.

"Perhaps there is a spy, Marsh," she said softly. "There are many people in Lo Lo Valley. We don't know them all as well as we know each other. And knowing each other so well, after all these years, Marsh, are we the only ones capable of raising a—a spy?"

He looked down at her. There were tears in her old eyes and her lips trembled in spite of the forced smile. Then she turned away and went back through the doorway. He stared after her for a long time, before he turned and went back to the open front door, where he scowled out into the night.

There was no relaxation, no admission that he might be wrong in his estimate of Jack. But between his lips came a soft exclamation, which had something to do with "a —— fool," but only Marsh Hartwell knew whom he meant.

A LONG train of cattle-cars creaked through the hills, heading for the eastern markets. Back in the rattling old caboose, a number of cowboys sat around a table under a swaying lamp and tried to kill time at poker.

They were the men in charge of the stock, and had found, to their sorrow, that a swaying, creaking, jerking caboose was no place for a cowboy to sleep. They growled at each other and swore roundly, when the caboose swayed around a sharp curve and upset their piles of poker-chips.

"I ain't got a solid j'int in m' body," declared a wizen-faced cattleman seriously, holding his chips in his hands. "By ——, I jist went on this trip t' say that I'd seen Chicago, but I'll never see it. Nossir, I won't. Yeah, I'll call jist one more bet before I fall apart."

"One more bet and 'Hashknife' will have all the money, anyway," declared "Sleepy" Stevens, yawning widely.

"I spur my chair," grinned Hashknife Hartley, a tall, thin, serious-faced cowboy. "And thataway—" he shoved in a stack of chips and leaned back in his chair—"I ride 'em steady, while you mail-order cow-punchers wobble all over and expose yore hands. Cost yuh six bits to call, 'Stumpy'."

"Not me." The wizen-faced one threw down his cards. "You call him, 'Nebrasky'."

"F'r six bits?" Nebraska Holley shook his head. "Nawup. I've paid too danged many six bits to see him lay down big hands. Anyway, I've had enough of this kinda poker. I wish t' —— that engineer would go easy f'r a while. I ain't slept since night afore last, and I didn't sleep good then."

"He's whistlin' for somethin'," observed Hashknife.

"Mebbe he's scared of the dark, and he's whistlin' for company."

"Whistlin' for a station," yawned Stumpy. "I asked the conductor about them whistles."

"Must be a wild station," observed Sleepy Stevens. "He's sure sneakin' up on it in the dark."

The train had slowed to a snail's pace, and finally stopped with a series of jolts and jerks.

"We're at a station," declared Stumpy, flattening his nose against a window pane. "I can see the lights of the town."

The conductor came storming into the caboose, swearing at the top of his voice.

"Some more —— hot-boxes!" he snorted. "Half of the axles on this —— train are on fire. A fine lot of rollin' stock to ship cows in. Be held up here a couple of hours, I reckon. Take us half an hour to cool 'em off, and then we'll have to lay out for the regular passenger."

"What's the town, pardner?" asked Nebraska.

"Totem City."

"Let's all go over and see what she looks like," suggested Hashknife. "I'll spend some of my ill-gotten gains."

"Not me," declared Nebraska. "In two hours I can be poundin' my ear."

"Me, too," said Stumpy Lee. "I'm goin' to sleep."

"How about you, Napoleon Bonaparte?"

Napoleon Deschamps, a fat-faced cow-puncher, who had been trying to read an old magazine, shook his head at Hashknife.

"Bimeby I go sleep too, Hartlee. De town don' int'rest."

"Well, Sleepy, we'll go. And you snake-hunters won't sleep much after we get back; *sabe?* C'mon, Sleepy."

They swung down off the caboose and walked the length of the train. Toward the upper end of the train lanterns were bobbing around, and there was a sound of hammers on steel. There was a dim light in the depot, but they did not stop. About midway of the main street a brightly lighted building beckoned them to the Totem City Saloon.

"Little old cow-town," said Hashknife as they walked down the wooden sidewalk, passing hitch racks, where saddle horses humped in the dark.

"I seen this place on the map," offered Sleepy. "I kinda wanted to know what country we were goin' through, so I took the trouble to look it up. This here is that Lo Lo Valley."

"Lo Lo, eh?" grunted Hashknife. "They liked it so well that they named it twice."

They walked into the Totem Saloon and headed for the bar. It was rather a large place for a cow town. There were not many men in the room and business was slack, but that could be accounted for because of the late hour.

A big, sad-faced cowboy was leaning on the bar, gazing moodily at an empty glass. It was Sunshine Gallagher, the deputy sheriff. He had come to the Totem Saloon, following the meeting at the Arrow ranch, and had imbibed considerable hard liquor. Sudden Smithy was across the room, involved in a poker game.

Hashknife and Sleepy ordered their drinks. Sunshine looked them over critically, and solemnly accepted ,Hashknife's invitation to partake of his hospitality.

"I never refuse," he told them heavily. "'S nawful habit to git into."

"Drinkin' whisky?" asked Hashknife.

"No—o—o—refusin'. Oh, I ain' heavy drinker, y'understand! I jist drink so-and-so. I c'n take it or leave it alone. Right now, I could jist walk away from that drink. Yesshir. Jist like anythin', I could do that. But wha's the use, I ask yuh? If it wasn't made to be drank—would they make it? Now, would they? The anshwer is seven times eight is fifty shix, and twenty-five is a quarter of a dollar. Here's how, gents."

They drank solemnly. Sunshine looked them over with a critical eye.

"Strangers, eh?" he decided.

"Just passin' through," said Hashknife. "We're goin' East with a train load of cattle. Old cattle-cars developed hot-boxes, so we had to stop a while."

"Thasso? Goin' East, eh?" Sunshine grew reflective. "I ain't never been East. Mus' be wonnerful country out there. No cows, no sheep—nothin'. Not a thing. I wonder how folks git along out there. Lo's of barb wire, I s'pose, eh? Whole —— country fenced in, eh? P'leecemen to fight yore battles. Nothin' for a feller t' do, but eat and sleep. Mus' be wonnerful."

"We dunno," admitted Hashknife. "This is our first trip East."

"Oh, my, is that so? My, my! Hones', I wouldn't go, 'f I was you fellers, nossir. Firs' trip is always dangerous. Let's have another snifter of demon rum and I'll try to talk yuh out of it.

"I had a frien' who went East. Oh, my gosh, it was ter'ble! Got drunk and bought him some clothes. My, my, my! Wore 'em when he got back here and got shot twice before anybody rec'nized him. Everybody thought he was a drummer."

"Did he have a drum with him?" asked Sleepy innocently.

"Huh?" Sunshine goggled at Sleepy wonderingly. "Shay! Me and you are goin' to git along fine. If you ever want to be arrested decently, you have me do it. Gen'lemen, I sure can do a high-toned job of arrestin'. I'm Shunshine Gallagher, the dep'ty sheriff of Lo Lo County 'f I do shay it m'self."

Hashknife and Sleepy shook hands solemnly with Sunshine, removing their hats during the handshaking. Sunshine was just as solemn, and almost fell against the bar in trying to make an exaggerated bow. Sudden Smithy drew out of the poker game and came over to the bar.

"Better let up on it, Sunshine," he advised.

"Oh, h'lo, Sudden," said Sunshine owlishly. "Meet two of the mosht perfec' gen-'lemen, Sudden. Misser Hartknife Hashley and Steepy Slevens. Gen'lemen, thish is Misser Smithy, our sheriff. Hurrah for the king, queen and both one-eyed jacks!"

Sudden grinned widely and shook hands with Hashknife and Sleepy, while Sunshine tried to shake the bar with both hands to hurry the bartender. Sudden was sober. Hashknife explained about their reasons for being in Totem City.

A couple of cowboys clattered into the place and came up to the bar, where they had a drink and bought a bottle to take with them. Both men were carrying rifles in their hands, in addition to the holstered guns on their hips. Both of them spoke to Sunshine and Sudden, but went away immediately.

Hashknife and Sleepy looked inquiringly at each other, but asked no questions. They were wise to the ways of the range, and knew that, as an ordinary thing, cowboys did not carry Winchesters in their hands at midnight, drink whisky in a hurry and ride away without any explanation.

But the sheriff vouchsafed no explanation, although they felt that he knew what was afoot. They drank to each other's good health.

"They're goin' Easht," explained Sunshine owlishly to the sheriff. "Use yore influensh, Shudden. Tell 'm lotta lies, won't yuh? No use wastin' good cowboys on the Easht, when we need 'm sho badlee. Talk to 'm."

"You better go to bed," advised the sheriff. "This ain't no condition for you to be into, Sunshine. Yo're a disgrace to the office yuh hold."

"Tha's right. I'm no good, thassall. No brainsh, no balansh. Ought t' git me a steel bill and live with the chickens. I'm jist ol' Shunshine Gallagher, if I do shay it m'shelf. But with all my faults, I'm hungry as ——. Now, deny that if you can. I dare you to deny me the right to eat."

"Speakin' of eatin'," said Hashknife seriously, "I'm all holler inside."

"Good place to eat here," offered the sheriff. "Up the street a little ways. I'm kinda hungry, too."

"Count me in," grinned Sleepy. "Let's go git it."

SO THEY went up to a Chinese restaurant, where they proceeded to regale themselves with ham and eggs, and plenty of coffee. Hashknife tried to draw the sheriff out in regard to conditions in that country, but the sheriff refused to offer any information. Sunshine went to sleep, with his head in a plate of ham and eggs, and the sheriff swore feelingly at him.

"He's a danged good deputy most of the time," he declared. "But once in a while he slops over and gits all lit up like a torchlight procession. He's harmless thataway."

After the meal, Hashknife and Sleepy helped the sheriff take Sunshine down to the sheriff's office, where they put him to bed. An engine whistled as they came out of the office, and Hashknife opined that they had better go to the depot and see if their train was ready to pull out. The sheriff offered to go with them, so the three of them sauntered up there.

A passenger train was just pulling out, but there was no sign of the cattle-train.

"Well, I know danged well we left one here," said Hashknife blankly, as they walked up to the depot and questioned the sleepy-eyed agent.

"Cattle-train? Oh, yes. Why, it left here quite a while ago. Went on to the siding at Turkey Track for the passenger."

"Oh, so that's where it went, eh?" Hashknife scratched his head wonderingly. "Where's Turkey Track sidin'?"

"About six miles east. They've pulled on quite a while ago."

"With all our valuables!" wailed Sleepy.

"That's right," agreed Hashknife. "There's an ancient telescope valise, inside of which is three pairs of socks, seven packages of Durham, two cartridge belts and two holsters."

"And my yaller necktie," added Sleepy mournfully.

"Well, that's almost frazzled out," said Hashknife. "Yuh can't wear 'em forever, yuh know, Sleepy."

"Yeah, I s'pose. It's a danged good thing that we saved our guns."

"Wearin' 'em *à la* shepherd," laughed Hashknife, opening his coat to show the butt of a heavy Colt sticking out of the waistband of his trousers. "We was headin' East, where it ain't proper to wear 'em on the hip, yuh know. Feller kinda gets so used to packin' a gun that he feels plumb nude if he ain't got one rubbin' his carcass."

"And we don't go East," complained Sleepy. "Dang it all, I'll never see nothin', I don't s'pose. That makes three times I've started East."

"Yuh never got this far before," laughed Hashknife. "Yo're gainin' on her every time, Sleepy. Anyway, we won't have to fight that blamed caboose t'night, and that's somethin' to cheer about."

They walked back to the Totem Saloon. The sheriff did not seem as friendly as he had been before they went to the depot. Down deep in his heart was a suspicion that these two men might be in the plot to sheep out Lo Lo Valley. They had arrived at an opportune time, and they did not seem greatly concerned over the departure of their train.

"What'll yuh do now?" he asked, as they stood on the sidewalk in front of the Totem.

"Sleep," said Hashknife. "No use worryin' about that train. It's gone, thassall."

"Yeah, it's gone, that's a cinch. Where are you fellers from?"

The sheriff knew better than to ask that question, and did not expect an answer.

"From the cattle-train," said Sleepy after a pause. It was more than the sheriff expected.

A man was coming down the sidewalk, and as he came into the lights of the saloon windows they saw that he was the depot agent. He stopped and peered at them.

"I was wonderin' if I'd find you," he said, a trifle out of breath. "One of them cattle-cars got derailed just out of Turkey Track sidin', and they're held up for a while. It ain't more than six or seven miles out there."

"A nice long walk," observed Hashknife.

"I can fix that," said the sheriff quickly. "I'll let yuh have a couple of horses and saddles. Yuh can leave 'em tied to the loadin' corral and I'll get 'em tomorrow."

"Now that's danged nice of yuh," agreed Hashknife. "We'll take yuh up on that, and thank yuh kindly. Let's go."

The sheriff led the way to his stable, where they secured two horses and saddles.

"It's only six or seven miles on a straight line, but yuh can't go thataway," explained the sheriff, leading the way back to the main street. "Yuh go straight north out of town, follerin' the road kinda northwest. Then yuh turn at the first road runnin' northeast. About a mile along on that road you'll find a trail that leads due east. Foller that and it'll take yuh straight to Turkey Track sidin'."

"This is doggone white of yuh," said Hashknife, holding out his hand. "We ain't the kind that forget, Sheriff. Yore broncs will be there at the corral. And some day, we'll try real hard to return the favor."

"Don't mention it," said the sheriff. "I hope yuh catch yore train. *Adios!*"

THEY rode out into the night. It was light enough for them to follow the dusty road, but not light enough for them to distinguish the kind of country they were traveling through.

"I hope they've got that danged car on the track, and are headin' East right now," said Sleepy, peering into the night. "I like this country, Hashknife."

"After seein' as much of it as you have, I don't wonder."

"Not that," said Sleepy seriously. "There's punchers packin' Winchesters, and nobody tellin' yuh what a —— of a good country this is. I tell yuh, there's trouble brewin'. I can smell it, Hashknife."

"Then I hope there's more than one car off the track, and that we can get to sleep on that caboose before the train starts. I can build up all the trouble I can use. If there's trouble around here, leave it alone. My old dad used to say—

" 'If yuh ain't got no business of yore own, yuh ain't qualified to monkey with somebody else's.' "

"That's a fine sentiment," laughed Sleepy. "But it don't work in our case. We've been monkeyin' with other folks' business for several years, haven't we?"

"Yeah, that's true. But it don't prove that we were qualified to do it. Mebbe somebody else could 'a' done it better."

"Well, I'd sure like to set on a fence and watch 'em do it," laughed Sleepy. "It would be worth havin' a front seat at the show. Here's that road runnin' northeast, Hashknife."

And Sleepy was right when he said that he would like to have a front seat at the show. For several years, he and Hashknife had drifted up and down the wide ranges, working here and there, helping to fight range battles; a pair of men who had been ordained by fate to bring peace into troubled range-lands.

It was not for gain nor glory. They usually left as abruptly as they came; dreading the thanks of those who gained by their coming; leaving only a memory of a tall, serious-faced cowpuncher with a deductive brain and a wistful smile. And of his bow-legged partner; him of the innocent blue eyes, which did not harden even in the heat of gun-battle.

They did not want wealth, power nor glory Either of them could have been a power in the ranges, but they were of that breed of men who can't stay still; men who must always see what is on the other side of the hill. The lure of the unknown road called them on, and when their work was done they faded out of the picture. It was their way.

JACK HARTWELL was in a white-hot rage when he rode away from the Arrow. His own father had virtually accused him of being a spy for Eph King, and his lifelong friends were all thinking him guilty of giving information to the invading sheepmen.

He set his jaw tightly as he spurred across the hills toward home, vowing in his heart to make them sorry that they had spurned his assistance and added insult to injury by declaring him a traitor. Once he drew rein on the crest of a hill and looked back, his throat aching from the curses that surged within him.

It was then that he realized how powerless he was, how foolish he had been to declare a dead-line around his property. It had been a childish declaration. And with this realization came the selfish hope that the sheep men might break the dead-line and flood the valley with sheep. He wanted revenge. And why not help them, he wondered?

His own father had outlawed him among cattlemen. He had been ostracized from the cowland society. He owed them nothing. Perhaps Eph King would welcome him into Sunshine Basin. He might even make him a sheep baron. But the vision did not taste sweet to Jack. He had the cattlemen's inborn hatred of sheep. He had heard them cursed all his life, and it was too late for him to change his attitude toward them.

He rode in at his little corral and put up his horse. There was no light in the house, but the door was unlocked. He went in and lighted the lamp. It was not late, and he wondered why Molly had gone to bed so early. He picked up the light and entered the bedroom, only to find it vacant, the bed unruffled.

He went back to the living-room and placed the lamp on the little table. It was evident that Molly had left the place. He went out to the stable and found that her horse and saddle were not there.

He remembered dazedly that she had said she might not be there when he returned. Back to the house he went, searching around for a possible note, which might tell him where she had gone. But there was no note. She had left without a word.

He sat down on the edge of a chair and tried to figure out what to do. Right now he cared more for his wife than he ever had, and the other events of the night paled into insignificance before this new shock.

Suddenly he got to his feet, blew out the light and ran down to the corral. Swiftly he saddled and rode out into the yard, heading straight back toward the slopes of Slow Elk Creek.

"Get ready, you sheepherders!" he gritted aloud. "I'm comin' after my wife, and I'd like to see any of yuh stop me."

Jack knew every inch of the country, and was able to pick his way through the starlit hills at a fairly swift pace. He knew that the dead-line was within three miles of his place, but he did not slacken pace until up near Slow Elk Springs.

As he rode up through the upper end of a little cañon, a man arose up in front of him, the starlight glinting on the barrel of his rifle. It was Gene Hill. The recognition was mutual.

"Where yuh goin'?" asked Hill in a whisper.

He was standing at the left shoulder of Jack's horse, as if to bar his way.

For a moment Jack hesitated, and then drove the spurs into his horse, causing the animal to knock Hill sprawling. Then he ducked low and went racing away toward the dead-line. Hill got to his feet, cursing painfully, searching for his rifle, while Bert Allen, of the Circle V, another of the watchers, came running through the sage, calling to Hill and questioning him as to what the commotion had been about.

"It was Jack Hartwell," said Hill, trying to pump some air into his lungs. "He tried to sneak through, and when I stopped him he rode me down. The dirty pup has gone over to the sheep."

"Gives us a good chance at him," said Allen. "I wasn't so sure about him before. We'll have to pass the word. Sure yuh ain't hurt, Gene?"

"Not bad enough to make me miss him, if he ever shows up here again."

Once out of range of Hill's rifle, Jack drew up, with the sudden realization that he had given them plenty of circumstantial proof that he was a spy. He knew that Hill would lose no time in spreading the report that he had forced his way through the dead-line. He laughed bitterly at the tricks of fate, but swore that somebody would pay dearly.

Then he realized that he was in a precarious position. The sheepmen would be looking for mounted men. Jack knew that they would be just as alert as the cattlemen; so he dismounted and went on slowly, leading his horse. There were plenty of sheep bedded down on the slopes of the hills, and they bleated softly at his approach.

Jack had made a guess as to the probable location of the main camp. It was a wide swale on a little tributary of Slow Elk Creek, where there was plenty of fuel and water, and also a bed ground for thousands of sheep. He led his horse out on to the rim of this swale, where he could see the lights of the camp below him.

There were several camp-fires, and as he came closer he could see the outlines of several camp-tenders' wagons. It was a big outfit and this was their main camp. Several men were playing cards on a blanket stretched in the light of one of the fires, and behind them several tents had been pitched. The men were all wearing holstered guns, and behind them, leaning against the guy rope of a tent, were several rifles.

Jack left his horse out beyond the firelight, and walked boldly into camp, coming in behind the players. Somehow he had slipped through the sheepmen's line of guards. He stood near the front of a tent, listening closely. The players were so engrossed in their game that they made signs instead of sounds. One of them lifted his head and looked at Jack, but made no move to indicate that he did not recognize Jack as one of them.

A few minutes later, three men came walking into camp. One of them was a big man, walking empty handed, while the other two carried rifles. As they came into the light of the fires, Jack recognized Eph King. He was head and shoulders above the other men, bulking giant-like in the firelight.

His head was massive, with a deeply lined face, looking harsh and stern in the sidelights, which accentuated the rough contour of his features. The two men sauntered over to the card game, while Eph King, after a long glance out into the night, turned toward the tent and walked past Jack, without looking at him.

Once inside the tent he lighted a lantern, and Jack heard a cot-spring creak a protest as King settled his great bulk upon it. Then Jack stepped over, threw back the flap of the tent and stepped into the presence of the sheep king.

For several moments the big man stared at him. He had not seen Jack for several years, and it took him quite a while to recall the features of his enemy's son. Jack did not speak, but waited to see what King would have to say.

The big man knitted his brows, glanced toward the flap of the tent and back at the cowboy, facing him tensely.

"How did you get here?" he asked harshly.

"Walked right in," said Jack evenly.

"Did yuh?" King studied him closely. "What for?"

"To take my wife back home."

Eph King started slightly.

"To take her back home, eh? Back from where, Hartwell?"

"From here!" Jack's jaw-muscles tightened and he leaned forward slightly. "By —— she's my wife and I want her! Now you produce her, King."

"Oh, is that so?" The big man's bushy brows lifted in mock surprize. "I'm not a wizard, Hartwell. In fact I don't know what in —— you are talkin' about."

"That's a lie, King! She came here tonight, and I came after her." Jack's hand clenched and unclenched over the butt of his gun. "Come on—tell me where she is."

The big man sighed and motioned to a camp chair.

"Set down, Hartwell. I'm not in the habit of lettin' men tell me that I lie, but you've kinda got the edge on me this time. At the risk of bein' called a liar again, I tell you that I haven't seen Molly. —— it, I haven't seen her since you stole her away from me."

"I didn't steal her," denied Jack hotly. "She went willingly. You knew she was goin', too. Was it a trick, King? Did she marry me to supply you with information?"

"Eh?" King scowled at the questions. "Did she marry you to—hm-m-m! What made you think she came up here?"

"She's gone. I just came from home. One of your men took a note to her. I reckon he came home with a smashed arm, didn't he?"

King nodded slowly.

"We expected a few smashes. There are more to come."

"But that don't tell me where my wife is, King."

"No, that's true, Hartwell. I wish I knew. She ain't here."

There was a ring of truth in King's voice.

"If she was here, I wouldn't lie to you, Hartwell. And if she didn't want to go back with you—well, you'd have a hard time takin' her. Didn't you realize that you was runnin your neck into it by comin' up here tonight? It's war, Hartwell. I'm leadin' one side and your father leadin' the other. And you came into my camp.

"It was a risky thing to do, young feller. You took a big chance of bein' shot. Do you think I ought to let you go back? You are my son-in-law, and I don't want to have yuh get shot."

"I reckon I'll go back," said Jack coldly. "I never seen the sheepherder yet that could stop me. I ——"

Jack stopped. King had lifted his hand from the blanket and Jack looked into the muzzle of a big revolver. The big man was smiling softly, and the hand holding the gun was as steady as a rock.

"Set down," he said softly. "Keep your hands on your knees. I'd hate to kill my son-in-law, but if you make a move toward your gun, that marriage is annulled by Mr. Colt."

"All right," grunted Jack. "I know that kind of language. Go ahead and shoot. It'll save yuh future trouble."

But Eph King only smiled and rested the muzzle of the gun on his knee.

"Futures don't bother me, Hartwell—not that kind. You come blusterin' up here and talk big. You kinda amuse me, so I've a —— good notion to keep you here.

Did yuh ever read about the old-time kings? They had a jester—a fool—to amuse 'em. I'm as good as they, so why not have a jester, eh?"

"A fool," corrected Jack bitterly.

"Very likely," dryly. "Still, I'd hate to even be amused by a Hartwell. Anyway, I've a notion to keep yuh here and let your father know that I'm holdin' yuh. It might——"

"Amuse him," finished Jack.

"Meanin' what?" queried King quickly.

"Meanin' that he thinks I'm a spy for you. They all think I am—except Molly. I forced my way through the cattlemen's dead-line to get up here tonight. They recognized me. I had to knock one of 'em down to get through. And they'd be liable to care a whole lot if I didn't come back, wouldn't they?"

Eph King stared at Jack closely. He knew that Jack was telling the truth and it seemed to amuse him a little. With a flip of his wrist he threw the gun behind him on the cot, and got to his feet.

"Hartwell," he spoke seriously, "do you want to throw in with us?"

"No."

"Still loyal, eh?"

There was a sneer in the question.

"Mebbe not loyal, King."

"Blood thicker than water, eh?"

"Probably. Anyway, I hate sheep."

King sighed deeply and threw open the tent flap.

"Sometimes I hate 'em myself," he said softly, as they went outside.

The men crowded around them, realizing that Jack was an outsider. His horse had just been brought in by one of the sheepmen. But none of them questioned King.

"This is one of the cattlemen," he said to them. "He is going back now, and I'd like to have one of you go with him until he passes our lines."

"Not with me," declared Jack. "I'll circle wide and come out away beyond the sheep. Much obliged, just the same."

"And tell all yuh know to the cattlemen, eh?" growled one of the men, and then to King:

"If one of 'em can ride into our camp, what's to stop a dozen of 'em from comin'."

"That's my lookout, Steen," replied King coldly. "All he knows won't hurt us any."

The men stood aside and watched him ride away. As soon as he was out of earshot, King swore harshly.

"You had the right idea, Steen," he said, "but I didn't want him to think that his comin' bothered us any. We've got to tighten the line. Next thing we know a whole horde of men will come ridin' over the hill, and —— will be holdin' a recess. But I don't think that Hartwell will tell what he knows."

"Was that young Hartwell?" asked Bill Steen, foreman for King.

"Yeah."

King nodded shortly and went back into his tent, where he sat down on the creaking cot, leaned his elbows on his knees and stared at the ground. From beyond the immediate hills came the sound of several rifle shots. The big sheepman shook his head slowly, thoughfully. Steen lifted the flap of the tent.

"I'm sendin' all the men down to the line for the rest of the night," he said. "We'll likely have to draw the herd back a little early in the mornin', 'cause they'll prob'ly start shootin' at 'em."

"I s'pose," King nodded. "Not too far, though. We'll have our own men placed, and mebbe we can do a little shootin', too."

"Sure. We ought to string 'em out pretty wide tomorrow. I think we've got more men than they have, and by stringin' out kinda wide, we can slip through the holes any old time yuh say. I don't think they can stop us when we get ready to start."

"When we get ready." echoed King. "We're not ready yet."

* * *

"YEAH, this is the right road, but where is that danged trail the sheriff told us about?" complained Sleepy. "I tell yuh we're past it, Hashknife."

"Prob'ly," agreed Hashknife dryly. "It's so danged dark that yuh couldn't see it."

They drew rein and debated upon their next move.

"Let's go ahead a little ways," suggested Hashknife. "Mebbe we ain't past it. The sheriff said we couldn't miss it."

"Mebbe he was educated in a night school and can see like an owl," laughed Sleepy as they rode on.

Suddenly both horses shied from something that was in the middle of the road. Hashknife dismounted quickly and made an examination.

"An old telescope valise, busted wide

open," he remarked. "Lot of women's plunder, looks like. Must 'a' fell out of a wagon."

He lighted several matches and examined it, while the two horses snuffed suspiciously at the smashed valise.

"I'll just move it aside of the road, where the owner can find it," said Hashknife. "Some woman is worryin' over the loss of all them things, I'll betcha."

They laughed and rode on, peering into the darkness. About two hundred yards beyond the valise, the two horses jerked to a stop. Hashknife's horse snorted and tried to whirl sidewise off the road, but the lanky cowboy swung it back and dismounted again.

"It's a woman this time," declared Hashknife as he leaned over the dark patch on the yellow road. "That driver must 'a' been pretty careless to lose his load thataway. Here, hold some matches for me, Sleepy, and don't let loose of my bronc. That danged jug-head must be a woman-hater."

Together they examined the woman, who groaned slightly as they lifted her to a sitting position. It was Molly Hartwell. She blinked at the matches and tried to get to her feet.

"You better take it kinda easy," advised Hashknife. "You've got a cut on yore head, which has bled quite a lot, ma'am."

"I—I know," she said painfully. "I guess I didn't have the cinch tight enough and the saddle turned with me. I tried to go back home, but I got so dizzy I had to lie down."

"Where do yuh live?" asked Hashknife.

Molly Hartwell peered out into the gloom and was forced to admit that she did not know.

"It is either—well, I don't know. Anyway, it is on this road."

"Well, it ain't behind us—'less it's hid," declared Sleepy. "So it must be the way we're travelin'."

Hashknife assisted her on to his horse, while Sleepy went back and got the valise. It was a cumbersome object to carry, and the broken straps made it almost impossible for him to keep from spilling its contents.

It was not far back to the Hartwell place. Sleepy opened the gate, while Hashknife led his horse up to the house. It was then that the valise refused to remain intact any longer. It skidded out of Sleepy's arms and the contents spilled all about. And as fast as he picked up one article another fell out.

Finally he tied his horse to the gate-post, so he could use both hands. The valise had evidently been packed with care, but in upsetting it had jumbled things until it was impossible for Sleepy to get them all back.

He swore feelingly, perspired copiously and finally tripped over the stack of white clothes. He came up with a handful of womanly garments, to be exact—a nightgown. It was of the voluminous kind, and its bulk forbade the shutting down of the valise cover.

Hashknife and the lady had gone into the house and lighted the lamp. Sleepy whistled to himself, as he slipped the nightgown over his head, ran his arms through the short sleeves, picked up the valise and started for the house. He had solved the transportation problem to his own satisfaction.

A man had ridden in at the rear of the house, but Sleepy had not seen him. He walked up to the open front door and stepped inside, just as Jack Hartwell came in through the rear door. Hashknife was standing near the table, looking at Mrs. Hartwell, who was sitting in a low rocker, her head held in her two hands.

Jack Hartwell's clothes were torn and there was a smear of blood across his face, which gave him a leering expression. In his right hand he held a cocked revolver. His eyes strayed from his wife and Hashknife to Sleepy, who stood in the doorway dressed in a white gown, and holding the bulky valise in his two hands. For several moments, not a word was spoken. Then:

"Evenin', pardner," Sleepy spoke directly to Jack, who was staring at him wonderingly. "Ain't you the feller I met in Cheyenne last year?"

Jack Hartwell shifted his feet nervously.

"No," he said hoarsely, "I've never been in Cheyenne."

"Neither have I," said Sleepy innocently. "Both parties must be mistaken."

Hartwell shoved away from the door and came closer to Hashknife.

"Who in —— are you? More sheepherders?"

Mrs. Hartwell looked up at Jack and at sight of his bloody face she started to get up. He looked at her. She was as bloody as he, and her clothes were dusty and disarranged.

"More sheepherders?" queried Hashknife.

"Yeah, —— yuh! What are yuh doin' here, anyway?"

"Excuse me for appearin' in this condition," said Sleepy, starting to disrobe, "but this thing was what broke the telescope' straps. There's a limit to what yuh can git into 'em."

Jack squinted at Molly.

"Where have you been?" he asked. "You've been hurt, Molly. Did these men ——?"

He whirled and faced Hashknife, who had moved toward him.

"They found me and brought me home, Jack. I—I was going away—going to Totem City to catch the train—home. But the cinch turned and I fell off. That valise was too heavy."

Molly Hartwell began crying softly, and Hashknife walked over to Sleepy, who had managed to get out of the gown.

"We better go, Sleepy," he said quietly.

"Just a minute," said Jack. "I'd kinda like to know who you two fellers are."

"Well—" Hashknife grinned slightly—"we're not sheepherders, if that'll help yuh any. We missed the place where the sheriff told us to turn off, and mebbe it was lucky that we did. We was headin' for Turkey Track sidin', wherever that is."

"I can show yuh how to get there," offered Jack. "Go out of my gate, turn to the left and foller that old road to the Turkey Track ranch. It turns and crosses the river leadin' right to the sidin'. Yuh can't miss it."

"Uh-huh, thanks," nodded Hashknife. "'Pears to me that there's a lot of folks around here that have confidence in us. The sheriff told us we couldn't miss that trail, too."

THEY walked out abruptly, mounted their horses and turned to the left, following the old road.

"What do yuh make of that outfit?" asked Sleepy, as they gave the horses a free rein and spurred into a gallop.

"It's got me pawin' my chain," said Hashknife. "Kinda looks like the little lady was goin' home to pa, but the cinch turned, and ag'in she's in the bosom of her family. Right pretty sort of a girl."

"And the husband looks like he'd been kinda pawed around, too," said Sleepy. "He had blood on his face and a gun in his hand. And he wondered if we were sheepherders, Hashknife."

"Well, it's none of our business, Sleepy. That hubby is a right snappy sort of a jigger, and he might be bad medicine."

"Do yuh reckon there's a sheep and cattle war on here?"

"There's somethin' wrong, Sleepy, and it feels like it might be wool versus hides. Anyway, it ain't none of our business, bein' as we're just a pair of train chasers and ain't got no interest in either side."

"I hope the cattlemen knock —— out of 'em," declared Sleepy.

"Same here. What's this ahead of us?"

They slowed their horses to a walk. Ahead of them, crossing the road, was a herd of cattle. They were traveling at a fairly good rate of speed, heading toward the river. From the bulk of them Hashknife estimated that there must be at least a hundred head.

A rider came surging down through the sagebrush, silhouetted dimly against the sky, as he urged them on with a swinging rope. The cattle cleared the road, and the circling rider almost ran into them, possibly thinking that these other two objects were straggling cows.

"Runnin' 'em early, ain't yuh?" called Hashknife.

For a moment the rider jerked to a standstill, and Hashknife's answer came in the form of a streak of fire, the zip of a bullet and the echoing "*wham!*" of a revolver. He had fired at not over fifty feet, but his bullet went over their heads.

Then he whirled his horse and went down the slope, swinging more to the east, before either of them realized that he had shot at them and escaped. The cattle were bawling, as they scattered down through the brush, evidently thinking that this loud noise was part of things designed to keep them moving.

"Well, can yuh beat that?" exclaimed Hashknife. "Shot right at us. Ain't this a queer country, cowboy?"

"I'll betcha that's a bunch of rustlers!" declared Sleepy excitedly.

"By golly, you do deduct once in a while," laughed Hashknife. "Let 'em rustle. As I said before, we're chasin' a train, not trouble. C'mon."

"Yeah, and c'mon fast," chuckled Sleepy. "That impudent son-of-a-gun headed down this road, I'll betcha. Shake up that old bed spring yo're ridin', Hashknife and he'll have to be a wing shot to hit us."

Together they went down the old road as fast as the two horses could run, each man carrying a heavy revolver in his right hand. The old road was only a pair of unused ruts, but the horses had good footing. A quarter of a mile below where the shot had been fired at them, a rider swung across the road and faded into the tall sage, but whether he was a rustler or not they were unable to say.

They drew up at the bank of the Lo Lo River and let the horses make their own crossing. The river was shallow at this point. It was only a short distance from the river to the old loading corrals at Turkey Track siding, but there was no sign of the cattle train.

"Empty is the cra-a-adul—baby's gon-n-ne," sang Hashknife in a melancholy voice as they dismounted and sat down on the corral fence.

"Who the —— told you you could sing?" asked Sleepy.

"A feller with a voice like mine don't have to be told. It's instinct, cowboy, instinct."

"Extinct," corrected Sleepy. "Like do-do-bird and muzzle-loadin' pistols. I wonder if that jigger was a rustler, or was he just nervous. Some folks are thataway, Hashknife."

"All rustlers are, Sleepy. The more I see of this country the more I envy Stumpy, Nebrasky and Napoleon in their nice, easy-ridin' caboose. Right now I hanker for that good old dog house. Sleepy, I hankers for it so strong that I becomes melancholy and must sing."

Hashknife cleared his throat delicately and began:

It was a dar-r-r-rk, stormy night,
As the train rat-tuled on,
All the pass-un-n-n-gers had gone to bed,
Except one young man, with a babe on his ar-r-rm,
Who sat there with bow-w-w-w-ed down head.
The——

"Hark!" blurted Sleepy dramatically. "There came a scream of agony! The lights went out! From somewhere came the crashing report of a gun. Then everything was still. A man lighted a match and held it above his head, dimly illuminating the room. But it was enough. The singer was dead—shot through the vocal cords."

"Didn't yuh like the song?" asked Hashknife meekly.

"——, the song was all right; it's the way it was bein' abused that made me step in and stop it. Yore ears must shut up tight every time yuh try to sing, Hashknife. That must be it, 'cause you'd never do it if yuh knowed what it sounded like."

"Uh-huh, that must be it," agreed Hashknife sadly. "I wish that train would back up long enough for us to get our belts and holsters. This darned six-gun of mine is goin' to give me stummick trouble, if I don't find a new place to carry it. The barrel is too long for my pocket."

"Carry it over yore shoulder," advised Sleepy. "We better go back and give these horses to the sheriff. It'll be daylight pretty soon, and I'm sleepy."

"Might as well," agreed Hashknife. "No tellin' where that train is by this time, so there's no use chasin' it."

They climbed back on their horses and rode toward the river. It would be daylight in less than two hours, and they were both weary. The horses splashed into the ford and surged through the knee-deep water over to the other bank, where the old road wound its way up through a willow thicket to the higher ground.

And as they rode slowly up through the heavy shadows of the thicket, a gun flashed almost in their faces. It was so close that the burning powder seemed to splatter them. With a lurching scramble the two horses broke into a frightened run, while behind them two more guns spat fire.

The horses needed little urging, as they ran blindly along the old side-hill road.

"Hit yuh?" yelled Hashknife anxiously.

"Burnt me!" yelped Sleepy angrily. "Yanked all the feelin' out of my left arm." He was half turned in his saddle, looking back.

"Don't shoot," advised Hashknife. "Don't waste ammunition."

Their belts and extra ammunition were on that cattle train, and all they had were the six cartridges in each gun.

"They're comin', —— 'em!" snorted Hashknife, catching a fleeting glimpse of several horses running toward them over a high spot in the road. "That sheriff never gave us race horses, that's a cinch."

They were running as fast as they were

able, but both of the cowboys knew that, as far as speed was concerned, they were not well mounted. But the horses were willing to run, and that was something to recommend them.

"We horned into somethin'," panted Hashknife, as a bullet whizzed past them. "Them danged fools have made a mistake."

"As long as they don't know it—say! That last bullet was too close! C'mon, Molasses!"

The pursuers were shooting recklessly now. The chase was nearing Jack Hartwell's place, and they seemed determined to kill or capture these two men before they reached that ranch.

Hashknife turned in his saddle and shot at them.

"That split 'em, cowboy!" cheered Sleepy. "Keep hittin' the grit."

THEN came a splattering of shots and Hashknife's horse went stumbling into a fall. But the lanky cowboy was not caught napping. As the horse went down, he swung free from the saddle and ran several steps before he went sprawling.

Sleepy jerked up quickly, whirled and sent shot after shot at the oncoming crowd, which had drawn up quickly. Hashknife got quickly to his feet and ran to Sleepy, where he vaulted on behind him.

"Got a horse to pay for yours," panted Sleepy, as he spurred the overburdened horse onward. "Went down in a heap."

Sleepy's volley had driven the pursuers to cover momentarily, but now they came on again. Bullets whizzed and skipped around them, but a stern shot at a running horse in the dark, especially from the saddle of a running horse, is rather difficult.

Hashknife turned and fired his last shot at them, as Sleepy whirled the horse into the yard of Jack Hartwell's place and rode up to the front of the building, where Jack was standing, wondering what the shooting was all about.

They fairly fell off the horse, shoved Jack into the house and slammed the door behind them. But the riders circled wide of the gate and went back the way they came.

"What—what was the trouble?" stammered Jack.

"Got any shells for a forty-five?" asked Hashknife calmly.

Jack shook his head. He carried a forty-four.

"But what was the matter?" he demanded. "I heard a lot of shootin' and——"

"So did we," laughed Sleepy. "They killed a horse for us. They might 'a' just been foolin', but they sure play rough."

"They sure did," laughed Hashknife, brushing the dust off himself. "I lit so hard I almost knocked the heels off my old boots."

They grinned at each other, and Hashknife, turned to Jack.

"We don't know who it was nor what it was about. A feller took a shot at us when we was goin' over to the sidin', and when we came back there was three or four of 'em bushwhacked us just this side of the river. I dunno how we escaped. My gosh, they were so close that the powder burned my bronc's nose."

"I got a furrow along my forearm," said Sleepy grimacing, as he pulled the sleeve away. "But it won't bother much. Kinda made the old arm feel like it was asleep."

"But what did they shoot at yuh for?" demanded Jack.

"You answer it," replied Hashknife quickly. "We don't know anybody around here. We borrowed the horses from the sheriff, and he'll likely blow up when he hears that one of 'em has been shot."

"Keep away from that door," advised Sleepy, as Jack started toward it. "Them pelicans don't need to recognize yuh."

"It sure beats me," declared Jack.

"Does it?" queried Haskhnife seriously. "Everythin' around here beats us, pardner. We ain't been here long, but we've sure found out that Lo Lo Valley is a dinger of a place to entertain a stranger. What's wrong around here?"

"Everythin'," said Jack bitterly.

"Sheep and cattle war?"

"Yeah."

"I thought so."

"Didja? Who are you fellers, anyway?"

"Couple of soft-shelled eggs."

"I guess so!" Jack snorted his unbelief. "Don'tcha know that Lo Lo Valley ain't a very healthy place for strangers right now?"

"——!" snorted Sleepy. "Mebbe yuh think we don't. Take a squint at my arm—and ask me that.

"I reckon I know what yuh mean," said Hashknife slowly. "Mebbe it looks kinda queer for us to be gallivantin' around here, but we had a danged good reason."

He explained to Jack how they had missed their train, and their reasons for going to Turkey Track siding. The explanation seemed plausible enough.

"Yo're a cattleman, ain't yuh?" asked Hashknife.

"Well," Jack laughed shortly, "I dunno. I've got cattle, if that's what yuh mean, stranger."

"My name's Hashknife Hartley," said Hashknife. "This here droopin' lily beside me is Sleepy Stevens."

"Hashknife Hartley?" Jack frowned thoughtfully. "Say, did you ever know a feller by the name of Casey Steil?"

"Casey Steil? Hm-m-m. Casey Steil. That name is familiar."

"I heard him tellin' about a Hashknife Hartley one night. I think Casey is from the Sweetgrass country."

"Lee Steil!" blurted Sleepy. "Kinda bench-legged, roan-haired, buck-toothed son of a gun, with green eyes?"

"That fits him," laughed Jack.

"And that ain't all," said Hashknife seriously. "Who does he work for?"

"He's been with the Turkey Track for a year. Slim De Larimore owns the outfit."

"Slim De Larimore? By grab, that's a fancy name. What is he, a exiled duke?"

Jack laughed and shook his head.

"Slim is all right. Casey Steil is all right, too, as far as I know."

"Nobody disputin' yuh, pardner. I wonder if them blood-huntin' jiggers have pulled out, or are they waitin' for one of us to show up."

Hashknife went to a window and peered out. It was getting lighter, and the east glowed from the coming sunrise. There was no one in sight. A horse was coming into the place, and Hashknife watched it approach the house.

"Here comes the bronc the lady tried to ride," he announced. "It's got the saddle under its belly."

"See any signs of our enemy?" asked Sleepy.

"Nope. I reckon they was afraid to be seen in the light."

The three of them went outside and removed the saddle from Molly's horse, and Jack offered them the use of the animal to ride back to Totem City and the offer was accepted. They put the saddle back on the horse and Hashknife lengthened the stirrups.

"We'll leave yore animal in the stable," said Hashknife as he shook hands with Jack. "Mebbe we'll see yuh later. We didn't intend to stay here, but after what happened a while ago, we feel like stickin' around a while."

"To find out who shot at yuh?"

"Yeah, they kinda made us curious."

Jack grinned seriously.

"I reckon you are the same Hashknife Hartley that Casey spoke about. We thought he was stretchin' it a little."

"What did he say?" smiled Hashknife.

"Oh, a lot of things. We was talkin' about rustlers and all kinds of bandits, and of fellers we knew that were wanted by this sheriff and that sheriff and by U. S. marshals. Casey says:

" 'It all depends on who wants yuh. Now, if Hashknife Hartley, the feller I've been lyin' to yuh about, wanted me, I'd either throw away my gun and yell like —— for him to come and get me, or I'd turn sailor and head for the tip end of South America.' "

Hashknife laughed and lighted the cigaret he had been rolling.

"He likely exaggerated a lot," he said. "I'm not an officer of the law—never have been. Never arrested any one in my life."

"Casey said the same thing—about the arrests. He said there wasn't anybody left to arrest. He sure boosted yuh to us."

"Well, don't believe half of it," laughed Hashknife, as he swung the horse around and joined Sleepy, who had been examining his animal for possible injury, and they rode back toward Totem City.

IT WAS a little later that morning when old Doctor Owen closed the door of the Arrow bunk-house and walked to his horse and buggy at the front gate. He was an angular, grave-faced man, well past middle age, an old family doctor sort of person.

He carefully placed his well-worn medicine case in the buggy, carefully wiped his glasses on an immaculate handkerchief before taking the halter off his horse. For twenty years Doctor Owen had been doing this same thing in the same way.

The medicine case must be placed in just such a position on the seat, the glasses must be polished, before he would take the halter off his horse. As he coiled up the halter rope to place it in its accustomed place in the buggy bed, he looked up at Marsh Hartwell, who had just ridden in.

Hartwell's eyes were red-rimmed and there was a weary stoop to his big shoulders as he spoke to the doctor.

"What's new, Doc? Patient doin' well?"

"The patient," said the good doctor slowly, "is dead. He passed away at exactly six-thirty-two."

It was like the doctor to be exact.

"Dead?" Marsh Hartwell turned away and glanced toward the bunk house. "Old Ed Barber is dead. I didn't think he was hurt that bad, Doc."

"It seems that he was," dryly. "Two bullets had passed entirely through him, one of them puncturing his lung. It was impossible to stop the internal bleeding. I shall notify the sheriff at once. It is, I believe, a case for the coroner, Marsh."

"Yes." Marsh Hartwell sighed deeply. "I—send me the bill will yuh, Doc?"

"There will be no bill, Marsh. I liked old Ed, and that was the least I could do for him."

The doctor got into his buggy and drove away. Marsh Hartwell stared after him for several moments before he turned toward the house, where Mrs. Hartwell and Mrs. Brownlee were waiting for news from the dead-line.

Mrs. Brownlee was two years older than Jack, a tall, thin-faced, tired-looking woman. Any beauty she might have possessed while a girl had long since departed with the drudgery of running a ranch-house.

Marsh Hartwell came slowly up to the steps, leading his horse. Both women knew that something was decidedly wrong.

"Did yuh know that Ed Barber died this mornin'?" he asked them.

They shook their heads. The doctor had not been to the house.

"Died about half-past six," said Marsh wearily. "Murder is all they can make of that."

"That's all the rest of it amounts to," said Mrs. Brownlee wearily. "It is just a grudge fight between you and Eph King—and your armies."

"You, too, Amy?" Marsh Hartwell looked curiously at her.

"Oh, well—" she turned away half angrily— "There will be a lot of men killed, men who have no interest beyond their monthly pay check. You branded Jack a spy last night; turned him out of his old home because he married a sheepman's girl. That was spite. I'm getting tired of spite and grudges. My husband is up there on your dead-line, trying to kill somebody, because you pay him sixty dollars a month."

Marsh Hartwell's expression hardened slightly, but he did not reply to his daughter's angry accusations. Mrs. Hartwell looked away. It was not her nature to accuse nor condemn. Mrs. Brownlee went into the house and closed the door, leaving Marsh Hartwell and his wife together.

"The sheep moved back a little this mornin'," he told her wearily. "Everything is quiet along the line, so I came home for a while. Anyway, I want to ride east along the Turkey Track end of the line and see how things look. We expect the sheep to spread into a longer line by tonight."

Mrs. Hartwell remained silent. They had not mentioned Jack since the night before.

"Too darned bad about old Ed," continued Marsh. "They shot him down like a dog."

"And who will pay for it, Marsh?" she asked.

"Pay for it? —— only knows. It was the sheep men who shot him, but the dirty spy who told them that old Ed was the guardian of Kiopo Pass is the real murderer."

"Who would tell?"

"Who?" Marsh Hartwell's features hardened. "Nobody knew it, except cattlemen. It was something that we guarded close. It was not the work of a spy; it was the deed of a traitor."

"And you still accuse your own son, Marsh Hartwell?"

The big man laughed bitterly and turned toward the door.

"Jack is no traitor, Marsh," she declared flatly.

"No?" Marsh turned and placed his hands on her shoulders. "I wish I could believe that, Mother. Last night Jack broke through our dead-line and went over to Eph King. He rode his horse over Gene Hill to get through. If he isn't a traitor, what is he doin' over there?"

"Are you sure, Marsh?"

"You bet I'm sure."

For several moments they looked at each other, the old lady with tearful eyes; the big man, whose thin lips showed in a white line now, his eyes filled with pain.

"It hurts you, too, Marsh?" she whispered.

"Hurts? Good God, it hurts! He's as much my son as yours, Mother. The men all know this. They don't say anythin' to me, and I'm tryin' to put myself in their place. I'm tryin' to forget that it's my son, but it can't be done, Mother."

He shut his jaw and turned away. Al Curt, a thin-faced, narrow-shouldered cowpuncher from the Turkey Track, was riding in at the main gate, so Marsh Hartwell waited for him to come up.

"Mornin', Curt," he said hoarsely.

"Mornin'. How's everythin' along yore line, Marsh?"

"Quiet. I just left there."

"Plenty quiet on our end, too. They ain't got the sheep down that far yet. Didja know anythin' about a lot of shootin' that was goin' on early this mornin' over near the old Morgan place?"

Marsh shook his head,

"No, we didn't hear it, Curt."

"Uh-huh. Wasn't none of yore men, eh?'

"My men were all on the line, Curt. I traveled the line twice last night myself. You say it was over by the Morgan place?"

"Yeah; about an hour or so before daylight. We could hear it pretty plain. Thought at first it was the sheep tryin' to bust through, but it was too far south for that. Must 'a' been fifty shots fired. Slim told me to ride down here and see what I could find out about it. I came past the Morgan place, but didn't see anybody."

"Wasn't anybody at home, Curt?"

"I didn't go up to the house, Marsh, but there wasn't anybody in sight."

"Where are you goin' now?" asked Marsh.

"I'm goin' back and let some of the boys off for breakfast. Was the sheep movin' any this mornin'?"

"Not much. I expect they'll take their time."

"They better," grinned Curt, and rode back toward the east end of the dead-line.

"What do you suppose the shooting was about?" queried Mrs. Hartwell anxiously.

"That's what I'm goin' to find out, Mother. It was near the old Morgan place. Now, there's no use borrowin' trouble. It can probably all be explained."

AND just to show that he believed in his own assurances, he mounted his horse and went galloping across the hills toward the Morgan ranch. He was afraid that some of the cattlemen had taken it for granted that Jack was the traitor and had paid him an early morning visit.

He knew that Gene Hill had not been lying when he said that Jack had smashed his way through the dead-line. Hill bore evidences of the encounter. Bert Allen had seen him, but not near enough for recognition. Things looked bad for Jack, but down in his heart, Marsh Hartwell could not believe that his son had turned traitor out of spite.

He rode to the top of a hill in sight of the little ranch, where he drew rein. There was no assurance that Jack would not enforce his private dead-line, and Marsh had no desire to be made a target for his son's rifle. From his elevated position he could see two men and a saddled horse in the front yard.

It looked very much like a black and white pinto, belonging to Sudden Smithy. He whistled softly and spurred down the hill, wondering what would bring the sheriff out there so early in the morning.

The sheriff and Jack were not having a very animated conversation, as he rode up and dismounted. In fact the sheriff seemed a trifle annoyed over something, and barely nodded to Marsh Hartwell. Jack did not make any sign.

"Ridin' early ain't yuh?" asked Marsh.

"Kinda."

The sheriff nodded shortly.

"What was all the shootin' about over here?"

"Shootin'?" The sheriff was interested. "Did you hear it?"

"No. Al Curt came over to the Arrow to see if we knew what it was all about. They heard about fifty shots."

The sheriff turned and squinted at Jack, who looked him square in the eyes.

"You heard 'em, didn't yuh, Jack?" he asked.

"Did I?"

"Oh, ——!" snorted the sheriff. "That's as far as I can get with him, Marsh."

"Well, what's it all about?" asked Marsh. "What do you know about it, Sudden?"

"I know this much—" he pointed at a saddle, lying on the ground near his pinto— "I loaned two horses and two saddles to two strangers last night. They came in on a cattle-train—or said they did—and the train went away and left 'em in Totem City.

"This train got off the track at Turkey

Track sidin', so I loaned 'em the outfits to ride over to catch their train. They were to leave the horses tied to the old loadin' corral. Later on I got to thinkin' what a fool I was to let 'em have them horses, so I saddles the pinto and takes a straight cut toward the sidin'.

"It was doggone slow goin', I'll tell yuh. I hunted in the dark for a shallow crossin' of the river, and wasted a lot of time thataway, finally havin' to swim across. Well, I finally got to the sidin', but don't see my horses.

"Just about that time I hears a lot of shootin' goin' on down by the old river crossin'. I rode down there, but finds that the shootin' is gettin' farther away all the time. Then I waited until daylight and came in over the old road. About a mile from here I finds my roan horse lyin' right in the middle of the road, too dead to skin. I took the saddle—and that's all I know."

"Well, that's quite a lot, Sudden," observed Marsh.

"Yeah, it's quite a lot, but not enough. Jack must know somethin' about it, but he won't talk."

"Why should I talk?" asked Jack coldly. "I never fired any of the shots, and I don't know who killed your horse."

The sheriff sighed and hooked his thumbs over his belt. He was plainly exasperated, so exasperated that he forgot caution.

"His wife answered my knock at the door," he said, indicating Jack, "and her head is all tied up in bandages. She looks like she'd been run through a threshing machine."

"You leave my wife out of this, Sudden!" snapped Jack. "She had nothin' to do with it. If you want to find out anythin', you better find them two strange cowpunchers."

"Yeah, and I'll do that too!" snorted Sudden. "They'll talk, or I'll know why."

"You better take their word for it," grinned Jack.

"Is that so?"

"Very likely."

"You know 'em, do yuh?"

"Ask Casey Steil about Hashknife Hartley."

"That's the tall one," said the sheriff quickly. "Casey knows him, does he?"

"I think he does."

"Well—" the sheriff picked up his saddle and turned to the pinto—"I reckon all I can do is to go back and wait for 'em to show up and talk about it."

He mounted his pinto, carrying the saddle in his arms, and headed for Totem City, while Jack and his father faced each other, both waiting for the other to begin.

"What did you want here?" asked Jack after a long silence.

"I heard about the shooting and I was afraid——"

"That somebody had come gunnin' for the spy?" Jack laughed harshly. "Don't mind me. I can take care of myself."

"Ed Barber died this mornin'."

"Aw, that's too bad. He was hurt worse than we thought."

"I forgot to tell the sheriff."

"He's got enough grief right now, I reckon."

"We've all got plenty of that, Jack. Did you see Eph King last night?"

"Yeah."

Jack was not trying to deny it.

"You rode over Gene Hill, didn't yuh, Jack?"

"Yeah, I sure did. He tried to stop me."

"They all know that you went over to the sheep last night."

"And then what?"

"Jack, don't you realize what that means? Good ——, they'll hold you responsible for old Ed Barber's death and for the sheep comin' into Lo Lo Valley. Have you lost yore mind entirely?"

"Mebbe I've lost my mind, but not my nerve."

"Nerve won't help yuh. Don't be reckless, boy. There is yet time to get away. I'll stake yuh. Peel out of here while the sheep are keepin' everybody busy. Take yore wife and head east until things are blown over. Won't yuh do that, Jack?"

"And admit that I was a traitor? ——!" Jack laughed bitterly and shook his head. "Not by a —— sight. Any old time I start runnin', it will be after somebody."

Marsh Hartwell turned to his horse and started to mount, but changed his mind and came close to Jack.

"Jack, I'm goin' to ask yuh a question that'll make yuh mad, but I've got to do it. Did yore wife have anythin'——"

"Leave her out of this, Dad," interrupted Jack, but his eyes did not hold steady.

"All right, Jack."

Marsh Hartwell mounted and rode away.

In his heart was the sudden conviction that Molly, not Jack, was the traitor.

"But is she a traitor?" he asked himself. "We've treated her all wrong, and Eph King is her father. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. And Jack is just reckless enough to die rather than let any one know that she is to blame."

Jack walked back to the doorway. Molly had just opened the door and was watching Marsh Hartwell ride away. Her head was swathed in bandages, and there was little color in her face.

"What did your father want?" she asked.

"Well, he thought we ought to run away, Molly."

"Run away?"

Jack had not told her of the suspicions against him, nor did she know that he had seen her father.

"Yeah," he said softly. "They think that I was the one that sent the information to your father. They've thrown me out, brandin' me a traitor. And I'll be kinda lucky if they don't come down here in a bunch and hang me."

"Jack, they don't think that!"

"Well, I wish you were right. While you was tryin' to run away from me last night, they were puttin' the sheep dip on to me. It was a big night in my life, I'll tell yuh. They think I did all this because Dad treated me the way he has. And last night I smashed my way through the deadline, Molly. I thought you had gone to your father. And the cattlemen seen me go through."

Molly stared at him, trying to understand what he had done.

"You went to see my father?"

"Yeah, and I seen him, too."

"Did you? Oh, what did he say, Jack?"

"Well," Jack smiled grimly, "he said that if there was any kings around, I could easy get a job as a fool."

IT WAS still fairly early in the morning when Hashknife and Sleepy rode into Totem City. They put both horses into the sheriff's stable and went back to the street, where Hashknife had seen a little harness and saddlery store. Here they were able to purchase belts and holsters. Luckily they were able to pick up some second-hand ones, which would fit their needs, and then they went to the general merchandise store to get a supply of cartridges.

Jim Hork, the proprietor, listened to their wants, and rubbed his chin thoughtfully, as he looked at his stock of cartridges.

"Mebbe I can let yuh have a box apiece," he said. "I'm runnin' low, and I've got a whole slue of orders."

"That's enough," grinned Hashknife. "We ain't goin' to shoot more than fifty men apiece."

Hork grinned and sold them the cartridges. They filled their belts and guns, and he watched them curiously, but Hork was a life-long resident of the cattleland, and did not ask questions. It was not often that strangers came to Totem City and bought revolver cartridges.

But Hashknife and Sleepy did not enlighten him. They knew he was aching for them to talk about themselves, but they kept a discreet silence. A little, barefooted boy came in to buy some kerosene oil.

"Did they kill any sheepherders last night, Mister Hork?" he asked excitedly. "Ma wants to know, she said."

"I dunno, Jimmy. Don't reckon they did. You ain't got no relations fightin' for the sheep, have yuh?"

"Me?" shrilled Jimmy. "By jing, I ain't! I hate 'em."

Hork laughed and went into a back room to get the oil.

"It's quite a battle, ain't it, Jimmy?" asked Hashknife.

"Well, it ain't—yet. Pa says she'll be a humdinger. Which side are you on, mister?"

"I reckon I'm on my side, Jimmy."

"Uh-huh." Jimmy scratched the calf of his leg with the big toe of his other foot. "I'll betcha they'll make Jack Hartwell hard to catch."

"Thasso? What did he do, Jimmy?"

"Jack Hartwell? Huh! Pa says he's the son of a gun that told the sheepmen all about when and how to git in here. He ort to be shot, y'betcha. He married a sheep-girl."

"Did he?"

"Yeah. That was quite a while ago. Nobody liked him since. And his pa is the biggest rancher in this valley, too. I know him and I know Mrs. Hartwell, too."

"Jack Hartwell?"

"I don't mean him; I mean his pa and ma."

"You don't like Jack Hartwell, Jimmy?"

"Well," the youngster hesitated, "I did—once."

"Who is yore pa, Jimmy?"

"Gee, don'tcha know my pa? He's the sheriff. I thought that everybody knew my pa."

"Here's yore coal oil," said Hork, coming in from the rear. "You tell yore ma she better get a bigger can. That one just holds an even gallon."

"Ma knows it," grinned Jimmy, holding it gingerly. "She measured it. If it ain't plumb full when I get home, me or you are goin' to catch thunder."

Hork exploded with laughter while Jimmy went pattering out of the store, watching his step closely.

"Jimmy is a great lad," observed Hork. "He sure sees the funny side of things. Was he tellin' you about Jack Hartwell?"

"Yeah," Hashknife inhaled deeply on his cigaret. "Jack Hartwell is in kinda bad around here, ain't he?"

"Well, it's too bad," admitted Hork. "Still, I reckon I ain't in no position to talk about it a-tall. If he done what they say he did, he ought to get hung. But if he didn't, he hadn't."

"Well, that's justice," said Hashknife seriously. "I hope he knows how yuh feel about it."

"I try to be fair about things."

"Well, that's right, I suppose. Sleepy, let's me and you go and wrap our insides around some ham and eggs. It seems like years and years since I ate anythin'."

They walked out and crossed the street to the restaurant, where they had eaten the night before. They ordered a big meal and did full justice to it.

"Now, we've got to face the sheriff," said Hashknife, loosening his belt. "I suppose he'll rise up and tear his hair when he finds that his roan horse is a casualty."

"I s'pose," agreed Sleepy dismally. "He'll tell us that the roan was worth five hundred dollars and that it could run faster than anythin' on four legs."

"Sure. If he don't tell us that, he'll swear that it was a family heirloom. It was, all right. The fastest move it made was when it started fallin'. Oh, well, human nature is queer."

They paid for their meal and walked outside. The sheriff had just ridden in and was talking to old Sam Hodges, of the Bar 77, in front of Hork's store. The sheriff still had the saddle in his arms.

"There's our first difficulty, Sleepy," said Hashknife. "We'll go right over and have it out with him."

The sheriff scowled at them, as they came across the street.

"Hyah, sheriff," grinned Hashknife. "You must be anticipatin' somethin' to be packin' an extra saddle with yuh thataway."

"Yeah?" The sheriff was not to be mollified. "Mebbe you fellers don't know where I got this saddle, eh? I got it off my roan horse."

"Oh, is that so? By golly, you got out there quick."

"Mebbe I did. And then what?"

Hashknife grinned widely and began rolling a cigaret.

"Before we go too far," he said slowly, "would yuh mind tellin' me how many hundreds that roan bronc was worth?"

"Not a —— hundred! Fact of the matter is, he wasn't worth six-bits. But that don't tell me nothin'."

Hashknife and Sleepy gawped at each other. It was unusual. In fact it had never happened to them before. Old Sam Hodges grinned. The sheriff had just told him enough to whet his interest in the matter. He instinctively liked the looks of these two cowpunchers, and old Sam was a pretty good judge of human nature.

"Somebody," said Hashknife mysteriously, "shot that horse."

"——, that wasn't hard to see!" snorted the sheriff.

"When I was on him, goin' as fast as he could go."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. We went to Turkey Track sidin', like we said we would, but the train was gone. We started back, like we intended to do, if the train wasn't there. And when we crossed the river, some folks started throwin' lead at us. By golly, they sure did heave the old shrapnel at us.

"They chased us all the way to that little ranch on the creek, where we busted into the house and the six-gun parade turned around and went away. About a mile from the ranch, one or two of them bullets hived up in the roan, and we had to do the last mile on one horse. Now, I dunno how you folks do things around here, but I think it's a —— of a way to treat strangers."

The sheriff squinted at Hashknife and turned to look at old Sam, who was masticating rapidly and trying to figure out what it all meant. Then he spat explosively.

"But who in —— was the shooters?"

"They never said," replied Hashknife blandly. "Mebbe they thought it wouldn't make any difference with us. But I'd rather be shot by somebody I know than by a total stranger. It ain't etiquette."

"It's sure beyond me." The sheriff shook his head. "Just why somebody desires yore death is more than I can figure out. Do you fellers know anybody around here?"

"Reckon not," grinned Hashknife. "We never were here before."

"And we ain't comin' ag'in," declared Sleepy. "I don't mind havin' one or two men shootin' at me, but when they come in flocks—I'm through."

"Well, they never scared the grins out of yuh," observed old Sam Hodges.

"Might as well grin," said Hashknife. "Outside of the sheriff's roan horse, nobody got hurt; and we'll pay for that."

"Yuh will not," declared the sheriff. "It wasn't no fault of yours, Hartley. I'd give all my horses to know why yuh was shot at. Kinda looks to me like somebody mistook yuh for me and Sunshine."

"Somebody that wants to wipe out the sheriff's office?" asked old Sam quickly. "Sudden, I'll betcha that was it. Find yore enemy and you'll find the men that killed the roan."

"The theory is fine," agreed Hashknife. "But there's one big flaw in it, gents. One horse was a roan and the other is a dark bay. At night nobody could identify 'em. And another thing; would they be lookin' for you and Sunshine to come out there last night?"

"And that," said old Sam, "picks a big hole in the idea."

"Yeah, it does," agreed the sheriff. "I'm goin' to put this horse in the stable and get me some breakfast. You fellers had breakfast?"

"Just exactly," replied Sleepy.

"Well, I'll see yuh later."

The sheriff turned his horse and started to ride away, but drew rein. A cowboy was riding toward them, coming in from the north. He swung off his horse and nodded to Hodges.

"I wonder if Hork has got any ammunition," he said.

"I ain't been in there," said Hodges, "but I don't reckon he's had time to get any yet."

"Uh-huh."

The cowboy glanced at the sheriff and nodded. Then he looked at Hashknife and Sleepy. For a moment he squinted, and a peculiar expression flashed across his face. He turned awkwardly and struck his shin against the wooden sidewalk, swore softly and went into the store.

Hashknife pursed his lips and began rolling a cigaret. The sheriff had seen Casey Steil's face, which told him that Casey had recognized these two men. Hashknife glanced up and found the sheriff looking closely at him.

"You know Casey Steil?" he asked.

"Casey Steil?" Hashknife frowned. "Where does he live?"

"Uh-huh."

The sheriff turned his horse and rode away. Hashknife looked inquiringly at Sleepy, who grinned widely.

"Lives at Uh-huh, Hashknife. Didja ever hear of that town?"

"That was Casey Steil who just went into the store," offered old Sam Hodges.

"Thasso?" Hashknife squinted toward the closed door. "What made the sheriff think I knowed that jigger?"

Old Sam did not say. He felt that it was none of his affair.

"Casey Steil worked for Slim De Larimore," he said.

"Uh-huh."

Hashknife did not seem greatly interested in Casey Steil. He turned to Sleepy.

"Gimme yore Durham, cowboy. I scraped my pocket for that last smoke, and this coat of mine is all wool."

"Go and buy yoreself some tobacco, why don'tcha?" complained Sleepy. "They sell it in that store."

"All right, yuh doggoned miser."

Hashknife stepped up on the sidewalk and went into the store. After a moment Sleepy followed him, with old Sam limping along behind.

CASEY STEIL was at the counter, talking with Hork, who had taken several boxes of cartridges off the shelf for his inspection. Steil glanced quickly at Hashknife and busied himself reading the labels on the boxes.

Hork sold Hashknife some tobacco, and when he turned back to Steil, the Turkey Track cowpuncher had walked away and was heading for the door. Hork grunted peevishly and put the boxes of cartridges back on the shelf.

Old Sam Hodges had been watching Steil, and he knew that Steil had walked away to prevent Hashknife from speaking to him. But Hashknife merely glanced toward Steil's disappearing back and began rolling a cigaret.

"Wanted shells kinda bad," observed Hork sarcastically. "Acted like he was half asleep. Didn't even seem to know what sizes he wanted. And then—" Hork threw the last box back on a shelf—"he went out without any."

"That's what is called lapse of memory," said Hodges.

Hashknife glanced quickly at the old man, and they both grinned. Hodges crossed the room to Hashknife and held out his hand.

"My name is Hodges—Sam Hodges of the Bar 77."

"Mine's Hartley—Hashknife Hartley of anywhere," grinned the lanky cowboy as they shook hands. "Sam Hodges, meet Sleepy Stevens. He belongs to the same outfit that I do."

"Glad to meetcha," nodded Sleepy, holding out his hand.

They shook hands gravely, and the three of them walked out of the store together. Casey Steil had mounted his horse and was riding out of town.

"My place is almost due east from here," said Hodges as they stopped at the edge of the sidewalk. "Anybody can direct yuh. We'd like to have yuh come out, gents. The Bar 77 ain't no millionaire place, but we eat three times per day, and there's always plenty of room at the table."

"That's sure nice of yuh," smiled Hashknife. "We'll likely be around here a few days."

"Fine. Come out any old time."

The old man got into his buckboard and rattled out of town.

"Salt of the earth," declared Hashknife. "I'll betcha he's as square as they make 'em."

"I won't bet," declared Sleepy. "Anyway, I'm more interested in Casey Steil. He sure ignored us, didn't he? Hashknife, that mean-faced jigger almost swallowed his teeth. He was so darned scared you'd talk to him that he barked his shins on the sidewalk. How come that yuh didn't speak to him?"

"That was up to him, Sleepy. Me and you know what Lee Steil used to be, but we've got to give him the benefit of the doubt. If he's workin' here and goin' straight—good for him. He don't need to be scared of us."

"I'll betcha he wishes he knew that," laughed Sleepy.

They walked down to the sheriff's office, where they found Sunshine, stretched out on a cot. He recognized them, but was in no mood to enthuse over anything.

"I reckon I was pie-eyed last night," he told them sadly. "My mouth tastes like the bottom of a parrot's cage today, so I know danged well that I had a cargo aboard. What's new? I heard Sudden swearin' around, but he didn't think me worth while talkin' to, I guess."

"Nothin' much new, Sunshine," said Hashknife.

"Uh-huh. Ahem-m-m-m! Any news from the battle front, I wonder?"

"Not much. Somebody tried to play rough with us last night, but only killed one of the sheriff's horses."

"Eh?" Sunshine sat up quickly. "Which one?"

"A roan."

"Oh, that old jug-head! I've been tellin' Sudden that the old roan was dead, but wouldn't lay down. What was it all about?"

Hashknife described how the sheriff had loaned them the two horses to ride after the train, and of what happened later. Sunshine gawped widely at the recital. He was still a trifle hazy from his potations, but most of it percolated through his brain.

"Well, that's what I call a —— of a note!" he declared. "Mistook yuh for sheepherders, eh?"

"Very likely," dryly.

"Still—" Sunshine scratched his touseled head—"they hadn't ought to do that either. You was horseback, wasn't yuh? Uh-huh. And it was dark, too. Come to think of it, it looks danged queer. How did they act?"

"Awful."

"Oh yeah. Sudden know about it?"

"About all there is to know, Sunshine."

Sunshine thought it over for a while, or tried to. Then he reached for his boots and drew them on.

"Well, I dunno," he said sadly. "I'm in no shape to work out puzzles. I git kinda giddy in the head."

The conversation lapsed. Sunshine tried to smoke a cigaret, but threw it away in disgust. Finally the sheriff came back to the office and sat down to smoke his pipe. He was not bubbling over with conversation either, confining himself to cursing a pipe that is always stopped up.

Then came Doctor Owen, carefully removing his hat, mopping his brow and adjusting his glasses.

"Old Ed Barber died at six thirty-two this morning," he stated.

The sheriff's pipe rattled on the desk top.

"The —— he did!"

"Yes. I suppose we shall have to hold an inquest."

"H-m-m. Yeah, I reckon we will. By grab! Poor old Ed's dead, eh?"

The sheriff picked up the pipe and polished the bowl with the palm of his right hand.

"Old Ed was murdered," he declared slowly. "Mebbe everythin' is fair in war, I dunno. This is goin' to stir things up badly. I swore to uphold the law, and I told 'em at the meetin' that I'd do it, but by ——, I'm huntin' for the men that shot old Ed. The law says that the sheep have the same right as cattle, but in a case like this, I reckon I'll make a few laws of my own."

"Don't yell," begged Sunshine, holding his head. "Sudden, you don't know how loud yore voice is."

"You stay sober!" exploded Sudden. "I'm goin' to need yuh, doggone yore hide!"

"Oh, aw-w-w right!" Sunshine held his hands over his ears. "Jist don't yowl at me. I've got a headache, I tell yuh."

Sudden turned to the doctor,

"We'll hold the inquest tonight at the Arrow, Doc. I reckon we can call in enough men for a jury."

"Yes, I think we can, Sudden. Well, I will be going now."

Sunshine sighed with relief when the doctor had gone.

"Too —— exact," he said wearily. "Tellin' us that old Ed died at exactly thirty-two minutes after six. I'll betcha he held a watch on old Ed. What the —— was he tryin' to do; find out if it was a world's record? Aw-w-w, gosh! I taste like Paris green!"

"You look like it, too," stated the sheriff. "You better go and rinse out yore system with strong coffee."

"Oh, aw-w-w right."

Sunshine groaned miserably and went in search of something bracing.

"What are you fellers goin' to do?" asked the sheriff. "Are yuh goin' to stay here a while, or are yuh pullin' out?"

"Yuh don't mind if we stay, do yuh?" asked Hashknife.

"No-o-o. I was just wonderin', thassall. How long have yuh known Casey Steil?"

"What makes yuh think we know him?"

The sheriff scratched a match and lit his pipe, which did not draw at all well. He spat disgustedly and threw it on the desk.

"Tell us about this sheep trouble," urged Hashknife. "We've heard enough of it to make us curious."

"Yeah?" The sheriff grinned wisely. "Curiosity killed the cat, yuh know."

"We'll take a chance on the cats."

"All right, they're yore cats, Hartley. I don't know neither of you two fellers. Mebbe yo're connected with the sheepmen, for all I know, but the causes of this trouble ain't secret. So I'll tell yuh about 'em."

THE sheriff was not a story teller. At times he was forced to go back and bring in other threads, but at last he finished, and attacked his old pipe again, while Hashknife tilted back in his chair and squinted at the ceiling.

"So old Marsh Hartwell turned down his son because he married Eph King's daughter, eh?"

"Well, Jack was an awful fool to bring her here, wasn't he?"

"Accordin' to yore liver and lights," said Hashknife thoughtfully. "On the other hand it was the natural thing to do. Did you folks ever think what a lot of —— it must'a been for that girl to have everybody dislikin' her?"

"Well, I s'pose it wasn't so awful nice, Hartley."

"And folks kinda turned Jack down, too, didn't they?"

"Yeah, yuh might say they did. But lookin' at it——"

"From yore point of view? Say, sheriff,

you folks have lived in this tight little valley until you've got so —— narrer that yuh could take a bath in a shotgun barrel. A lot of you folks can't see higher than a cow's vertebray. That's a honest fact. I'm not tryin' to start an argument.

"You never stop to think that bein' cattlemen or sheepmen is only occupation, not blood. I'm not tryin' to defend the sheep. I ain't got no more use for a sheep than you have. I hate the danged things. I know what they'll do to a range, and I know that the cattle business is rockin' on the narrow edge right now, on account of the sheep; but I also know that sheepmen are just as human as cattlemen. They're mostly cattlemen gone wrong."

"Well, we won't argue about sheepmen," said the sheriff. "Jack's own father accused him of bein' a traitor, but I've got a sneakin' idea that it's Jack's wife, not Jack."

"That's sure a sneakin' idea," agreed Hashknife softly.

The sheriff caught Hashknife's meaning, but did not show that it had offended him. He was more sure now that Hashknife and Sleepy were in some way connected with the sheep. Else why would Hashknife defend the sheepmen?

"Are you fellers goin' to try and get work around here?" he asked.

Hashknife smiled and shook his head.

"No, I don't reckon we will, sheriff. We was takin' a vacation, by ridin' that cattle train East; but that idea got ruined, so we'll kinda mope around here for a while instead—if yuh don't mind."

"——, it's a free country, gents."

"Too —— much so," grinned Sleepy. "Folks feel free to take shots at yuh any old time. They really ought to have an open and closed season on human beings."

The sheriff laughed and began tinkering with his pipe, so Hashknife and Sleepy got to their feet.

"Mind if we attend the inquest tonight?" asked Hashknife.

The sheriff looked up quickly,

"Be glad to have yuh, Hartley. Ride out with me, if yuh want to. If yuh don't want to ride Hartwell's horse, I'll get yuh one."

"Much obliged, Sheriff. See yuh later."

They went outside, leaving the sheriff debating what to do about them. There was no doubt in his mind that they had purposely been left behind by that train. It was all too obvious. And as long as they were not in the employ of the cattlemen, it must be that they were employed by the sheepmen to work behind the cattle lines. The sheriff decided that these men were well worth watching. He did not care to share his suspicions with any one, as he wanted full credit when the *dénouement* came.

THAT night the inquest over Ed Barber's body was held in the big bunk house at the Arrow. The low-ceiled room was hazy with tobacco smoke when Hashknife and Sleepy went in with the sheriff. At sight of the two strange cowboys the conversation stopped. Old Sam Hodges alone greeted them kindly.

Matthew Hale, the prosecuting attorney, and Doctor Owen, the coroner, had already drawn the jury, which consisted of Buck Ames and Mel Asher of the 404, Cloudy McKay of the Arrow, Gene Hill of the Bar 77, Abe Allison of the Turkey Track and Bert Allen of the Circle V.

Hashknife and Sleepy sat down near the door, feeling strangely out of place. They studied the faces of the crowd and decided that there were no mail-order cowpunchers present. They were a hard-looking, bronzed-faced crew of men, unkempt, heavily armed. The sheep had served to keep many of them from procuring clean clothes or using a razor.

But none of them asked questions regarding Hashknife and Sleepy. The fact that they had come with the sheriff kept many from wondering why these two strangers came to the inquest. There was no delay in the proceedings. Honey Wier was put on the stand and described how he had found old Ed Barber, and what the old man had said to him.

"Nossir, he didn't say who shot him," declared Honey. "Somebody sneaked in on the old man and popped him over the head, so he told me. They tied him up. Nossir, he didn't know who shot him."

That was the sum and substance of the evidence. Old Ed had told them practically the same story before the doctor had come. Doctor Owen testified to the fact that the old man had died from two gunshot wounds, which had been made by a .38-55 caliber rifle.

And with this evidence the jury brought

in the usual verdict to the effect that old Ed Barber had come to his death from gunshot wounds, inflicted by a party or parties unknown.

"Well, I reckon that's about all we can do," said Honey Wier, as the jury was dismissed. "Anyway, it's all we can do until we can put the deadwood on the men who done the shootin'."

"Which can't be done," declared Abe Allison, a lean-jawed, tobacco-chewing, wry-necked cowpuncher. "My idea is to wipe out all them —— sheepherders, and by doin' that we can sure hit the guilty ones. By ——, that's what I'd like to do."

"Hop to it," grinned Sam Hodges. "There ain't nobody settin' on your shirttail, is there, Abe?"

The crowd laughed, but with little mirth, while Allison bit off a fresh chew and tried to think of some smart remark to hurl back at Hodges, who was probably two or three answers ahead of Allison.

The prosecuting attorney, of the stolid, red-faced type, whose very presence breathed the majesty of the law, scanned the faces of the crowd until his gaze rested upon Hashknife and Sleepy. He had been long in Lo Lo Valley, and knew every man, woman and child. After a close scrutiny he turned to the sheriff.

"Sudden, who are the visitors?" he asked.

The sheriff squinted at Hashknife and Sleepy, and his eyes flashed around the circle.

"Gentlemen, I don't know," he said mysteriously. "They laid claim to being stranded from a cattle train but their opinions has kinda led me to think that mebbe the sheep was their reason for bein' stranded. Queer things has happened since they came, so I decided the safest thing to do was to keep 'em kinda in sight. This might be a danged good place to ask questions, folks."

Hashknife and Sleepy had not moved. The sheriff's words were as much a surprize to them as they were to the crowd. Then one of the cattlemen swore audibly and several shifted in their chairs.

"What do yuh mean, Sudden?" asked Marsh Hartwell, who had taken no active part in the inquest, but had kept well in the background.

"Well,—" the sheriff shrugged his shoulders—"it might be a handy thing for Eph King to have somebody behind our line, Marsh."

"By —— that's right!" exclaimed Cloudy McKay. "We'll jist ask a few questions."

"And get answers," snorted Gene Hill. "We'll find——"

The sheriff had made a move to get between Hashknife and the door, but the lanky cowboy shot out of his chair and backed against the door, covering the men with his gun, while Sleepy backed into a position beside him, his gun tensed at his hip.

"Don't move!" ordered Hashknife sharply. "I can see every man in this room, and I'm gunnin' for a move. Just relax, please."

"I told yuh," complained Sudden. "Yuh see now, do yuh?"

"Aw, shut up," snorted old Sam Hodges. "If you seen so —— much, why didn't yuh act before?"

"Yo're all wrong, sheriff," said Hashknife easily. "We're not connected in any way with Eph King nor the sheep interests."

"Then whatcha make all this gun play for?" asked Gene Hill.

"Because a lot of —— fools like you ain't got brains enough to try a man before yuh hang him. Our answers to your questions wouldn't suit yuh at all, so we'd get hung. Sleepy, go out and get the horses ready, while I keep 'em interested."

Sleepy slid carefully outside. Old Sam Hodges laughed softly and some one questioned him in a whisper.

"Why?" asked the old man. "Can't I laugh if I want to? I was just thinkin' that it would be impossible for one man to stick us up, but it ain't. I ain't got no more desire to draw a gun than I have to go swimmin'. That one man ain't got no more license to keep the drop on us than anything, but he's doin' it."

"Against the law of averages," admitted Hashknife smiling. "But it's psychology, Hodges. I'm doin' this to save my life. If killin' me would save yore lives, I'd live about a second. Don'cha see the edge I've got? I've got everythin' to gain; you'd have everythin' to lose, without a chance of personal gain."

Came a low whistle from Sleepy, who had led the horses up to the doorway. Hashknife backed half way through the partly open door, still covering the crowd. Then he fired one shot directly over their heads, ducked back and sprang for his horse.

In a moment they were both mounted and

spurring for the gate, while the demoralized crowd in the bunk house bumped into each other, swearing, questioning, trying to find out if anybody had been hit. The shot had held them long enough for Hashknife and Sleepy to disappear in the night, and when the crowd did manage to get outside, there was not even the sound of galloping hoofs to tell which way the two men had gone.

Some of the men mounted their horses, but did not leave the ranch. There was considerable speculation as to where they might go, but Lo Lo Valley was a wide place in which to search for two men in the dark. They went back into the bunk house, where the sheriff was besieged with a barrage of questions. He admitted that he had nothing except his own suspicions to work on, but he pointed out that they had all been held up at the point of a gun, and that the two men had made their get-away.

"Yeah, they're guilty of somethin'," declared Gene Hill.

"Guilty of havin' brains," growled Sam Hodges.

"One of 'em is ridin' yore horse, ain't he?" asked Honey Wier.

"Yeah; the tall one. The other one is ridin' a horse that belongs to Jack Hartwell."

"Jack Hartwell?"

"How'd he get that horse?"

"Where does Jack fit into this?"

"Are they friends of Jack?"

These questions and many others were hurled at the sheriff, who threw up both hands and proceeded to tell just how and why Sleepy Stevens was riding Jack Hartwell's horse. He told them all about the killing of his horse, or rather Hashknife's version of it.

"But who would shoot at them?" demanded Marsh Hartwell.

"Search me," replied the sheriff wearily. "I don't *sabe* it."

"Aw, they're lyin' about it," opined Allison.

"Wait a minute," said Marsh, turning to Allison. "You were with Slim De Larimore, Allison, when these shots were fired."

"That's right," Allison nodded quickly. "Al Curt rode down here to see if you knew what it was about. There sure was a lot of shootin' goin' on. We thought it was a battle somewhere along the line."

"Do you suppose they ran into a bunch of sheepherders?" asked Sam Hodges.

"I don't know," Marsh Hartwell shook his head. "It was behind our lines, and I'd hate to think that the sheepmen could seep through that way, Sam. And if they were down here, why start a battle with two men, who were merely ridin' along, mindin' their own business?"

"Queer," declared Sam Hodges. "In fact, it would take a lawyer to figure it out. Where's Matt Hale?"

"He beat it for home," laughed a cowboy. "As soon as Matt got outside he fogged out."

"That six-gun made him nervous, I guess," laughed Sam. "It made me nervous, too. If I'm any judge of human nature, that long-geared puncher would shoot at the drop of the hat, and drop it himself."

"Yeah, he's a gunman," agreed the sheriff. "They both are. And what would two gunmen be doin' around in a strange country, I ask yuh?"

"Which don't get a rational answer from anybody," said Honey Wier disgustedly. "It's time we went back to the seat of war and gave the rest of the boys a chance to grab a cup of coffee."

"That's about right," agreed Marsh Hartwell. "We'll let the sheriff grieve over his lost horse, while we protect our own."

"I ain't goin' to grieve a whole lot," declared Sudden. "Just now I feel like a —— fool for denouncin' these two men, and lettin' 'em get away. They won't be noways friendly to me."

"If you wanted their friendship, why didn't yuh keep your mouth shut until you have evidence to work on?" asked Hodges. "You plumb ruined any chance to connect them with any crime. They know how everybody feels toward 'em, and if they are with the sheep, all they've got to do is ride behind the line. And right now I'm ——ed if I care to face them across a dead-line."

"I reckon we can handle 'em," said Allison.

"You can have my share, Allison."

"——, they ain't much."

"Let's get back to the line," said Marsh Hartwell. "If Eph King planted those two men behind our lines, they've failed to do him any good. From now on we'll be on the lookout for them. Let's go."

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy rode blindly into the hills. Their main idea was to put a certain distance between themselves and the Arrow ranch, which they proceeded to do as rapidly as possible. There was no moon yet. As soon as they were far enough away to preclude possibility of pursuit, they drew rein and debated on their next move.

"We're in a sweet mess," declared Sleepy. "Everybody and their brother-in-law will be gunnin' for us, Hashknife."

"Sure thing. What struck that danged sheriff? I never expected anythin' like that, did you?"

"I'm gettin' so I never know what to expect in this life. What'll we do now? Every hand will be ag'in' us, cowboy."

"Two poor little orphings, Sleepy. Honest, I feel like cryin'. If I didn't wear long pants, I'd sure bawl a plenty. But I have to laugh when I remember how them jiggers looked at us. They sure didn't want to set there with folded hands, did they? I sure looked for one of 'em to make a break, but they remained comatose."

"Yeah, and we'll remain comatose, if some of them fellers run across us in their present frame of mind. Where do we go?"

"I dunno," confessed Hashknife. "As far I can see, we ain't got no place to go. The sheriff will probably arrest us for horse stealin', and—aw, I dunno. Let's go and visit Jack Hartwell. Nobody likes him, and misery likes company.

"All right," laughed Sleepy. "Which way is his place from here?"

"Where is here?" asked Hashknife. "We're kinda lost, Sleepy."

It was so dark that they had lost all sense of direction, and they knew it would be several hours before the moon came up.

"Well, we won't get there unless we start," declared Hashknife. "Jack Hartwell lives somewhere, and if we go far enough we might strike a road. C'mon."

Hashknife instinctively swung to the left, and they started out in singe file. It was slow traveling, as the country was broken up with small cañons, washouts and brushy swales, where they were forced to swing wide in order to cross.

For about an hour they poked aimlessly along, hoping to cross a road or run into some sort of habitation.

"I'll betcha we're in another county," said Sleepy. "We've come miles and miles. I figure that we've passed Jack Hartwell's place."

"Mebbe, perhaps and probably," agreed Hashknife. "If that old moon would only come up we might be able to see somethin'. But, in the mean time, we might as well keep movin'."

For about thirty minutes they kept going, but now they were bearing to the right a little. The hills had become more precipitous, and they felt that they were altogether too high to strike their destination.

Then Hashknife discovered a light. It was quite a way below them, but it did not take them long to find that it was a light in a ranch-house window. It was plainly evident that it was not Jack Hartwell's place, as it was a much larger ranch house. They found the gate, and rode up to the house.

The light they had seen was from a kitchen window, so around to the kitchen door they went and knocked loudly.

"Whasamalla you?" called a Chinese voice.

"Little of everythin', John," laughed Hashknife. "We're lookin' for information."

"Yessah?"

The Chinaman evidently misunderstood. He opened the door a little, and peered out at them.

"What ranch is this?" asked Hashknife.

"Tu'key Track, yo' sabe?"

"Turkey Track, eh? Anybody home?"

"Yessah—me."

"Good. Now that yo're at home, John, mebbe yuh can tell us how to find Jack Hartwell's place."

"Jack Ha'twell? Yessah, I *sabe*. Yo' want find him place?"

"If it ain't stretchin' yore imagination too much."

"Yessah. Yo' go those way." He pointed back across the kitchen. "Yo' find road pretty quick. Bimeby yo' find Ha'twell place."

"Uh-huh," nodded Hashknife. "I *sabe* fine, John. Much obliged."

"Yessah, yo' find plenty good now. Goo'-ni'."

He shut the door in their faces, and they heard him drop the bar into place.

"Yuh can't beat a chink for caution," laughed Hashknife, as they mounted their horses. "We must 'a' swung away north of Jack Hartwell's place."

They left the Turkey Track and soon found that they were on the old road of the night before. The horses were willing to follow this, after miles of brushy going. About a mile along the road they suddenly drew rein. Some one ahead of them had lighted a match.

They drew off to one side, and in a minute a rider passed them, puffing on a cigaret. They gave him plenty of chance to ride on, before they swung back into the road.

"That was probably one of the Turkey Track riders, who was at the inquest," said Hashknife. "I'll betcha they're all wonderin' where we went."

"I'll betcha I don't care," said Sleepy. "I'm wonderin' what's goin' to become of us. We can't buck the whole county, Hashknife."

"Not all at once, Sleepy. We may have to make 'em form a line. Right now I feel so danged sleepy that I don't care what happens."

"I hope I never get that way. When my hide is in danger, my skin tightens up so much that I can't shut my eyes."

THEY rode in at the gate of Jack Hartwell's place and dismounted at the corral. There was no sign of a light in the house. They unsaddled and put the horses into the the little corral, threw them some hay and debated on what to do.

"Will we wake 'em up?" asked Sleepy.

"Not under the circumstances. We'll see if there's some hay in his little stable, and if there is, we'll hive up there for the night. It ain't noways healthy to go knockin' on ranch-house doors at night in Lo Lo Valley. In the mornin' we'll start in clearin' the atmosphere around here."

"What do yuh mean, Hashknife?"

"Why, kinda settlin' arguments and all that."

"Oh, yeah. Listen to me, cowboy: Our best bet is to slide out of here as fast as we can. We'll never get anywhere in an argument with these folks. The best we can hope for is a chance to write our last will and testament, as the lawyers call it. My idea of a good time would be to sneak over to Turkey Track crossin', flag down the first train and hook our spurs into a cushion seat. We ain't got no business around here."

"All right," Hashknife sighed heavily. "I didn't know you was the runnin'-away kind, Sleepy. Have you forgotten last night? Have you forgiven them men for shootin' a horse out from between the legs of your little friend? And last, but not least, do you want to run away from these kind folks, who like us so well that they want to fix it so we'll never leave their soil?"

"Mm-m-m, well," hesitated Sleepy, "let's see if there's any hay in this stable. If there ain't, we can carry some in from the stack."

AND that same night Eph King stood in the light of one of the camp-fires and gazed off into the night; a huge figure of a man, his deeply lined face high-lighted in the glow from the fire, his head bared to the wind. Near him crouched the wizened old man who did his cooking, poking coals around a huge coffee-pot.

The little cook straightened up and looked at King.

"Want a cup of hot coffee?" he asked.

King shook his head slowly.

"No, Shorty."

"Uh-huh." The cook squinted out into the night. "It ain't like I expected, is it to you?"

"What's that, Shorty?"

"The fight. I had a idea that there'd be a lot of shootin' and all that. But all we've done is to set here. A lot of the men was arguin' about it last night. Some of 'em wondered if you was afraid to bust that line, or if you was tryin' to play safe and wait a while."

"I wondered what they'd think, Shorty." Eph King turned his back to the fire and gazed back toward Kiopo Pass. "We'll go just as soon as the word is passed. I don't want to see a lot of killin', when we can get what we want without it. Once we get on to the lower ranges, the law will take care of us. Possession is nine points in the law, Shorty."

"Yeah, I've heard that, King. Well, mebbe yo're right. When a feller is dead, he's jist dead, thassall. It's plumb easy to kill a man, but there ain't nobody found out how to unkill him."

Eph King smiled grimly. Shorty Jones had been working for him ever since he had started into the sheep business, and was more like one of the family than a hired man.

"But what I don't *sabe*," remarked Shorty, "is what yuh mean by havin' the word passed. Yo're the boss, King."

King shrugged his shoulders.

"I can't tell you right now, Shorty. I may be an awful fool, but I don't want every one to know it ahead of time."

A man came out of a tent and approached the fire. As he came into the light, King spoke to him.

"How's the arm, Mac?"

It was the man who had carried the note to Molly Hartwell.

"'Sall right, boss," he said. "Scraped the bone and took away a little meat. Got her bandaged tight and can't use it, but it'll be all right pretty soon."

"Want some coffee, Mac?" asked Shorty.

"Yeah, I'll drink a cup, Shorty."

As the little cook bustled away after a tin cup, another man came in out of the night, leaned his rifle against the side of a tent and came over to the fire. It was Steen, the foreman.

"Well, what do yuh know, Steen?" asked King.

"Not much, boss. They held an inquest at the Arrow tonight. There were two strange cowpunchers there, and somebody passed the word that they were spies for you. They got away. Jack Hartwell and Molly are in danger right now."

Shorty came back, carrying several cups, which he filled and passed two of them to Steen and the one called Mac.

"They're sure that either Jack or Molly are spies," said Steen. "And that's about all I can find out, except that we'll have to wait a while longer. The cattlemen don't *sabe* us, and they're watchin' the line pretty close. We might make a bluff to get through on the west end tomorrow."

King did not reply to Steen's suggestion. The foreman placed his cup on the ground and squatted on his heels while he rolled a cigaret. Then:

"Steen, do you know what kind of fish yuh could catch, if yuh used about thirty thousand sheep for bait?"

The foreman looked up at him blankly.

"I dunno what yuh mean, boss."

"I didn't think yuh did, Steen. You ain't that kind."

He turned to Mac.

"Think you could find that old Morgan place again, Mac?"

"Yeah."

"All right. We're going down there tonight."

"Better not," advised Steen. "They've plugged all the holes, and yuh might run into some hot lead."

"We're goin' down," said King firmly.

Steen knew better than to voice any more objections. When Eph King made up his mind to do a thing, nothing would stop him. He offered to go along, but King objected.

In a few minutes Mac and King left the camp, heading in a southeasterly direction. They passed through the bedded sheep and worked their way down Slow Elk Cañon. It was so dark that the Bar 77 men were unable to distinguish an object at three feet distance, and as a result they passed safely through the dead-line.

From there it was an easy task to follow the creek to the old Morgan place. Hashknife and Sleepy heard them walk past the stable, talking in an undertone. Without a word the two cowboys crawled out of the hay and opened the stable door. King and his companion had reached the door of the ranch house, and their knocking was audible to Hashknife and Sleepy.

"What do yuh make of it?" whispered Sleepy.

"I dunno. Mebbe they're friends, Sleepy."

There was a long period of silence, and then some one called from inside the house.

"This is Eph King talkin'," replied King.

Hashknife and Sleepy were unable to hear what was said, but a moment later a lamp was lighted, and the door opened. The two men went inside and closed the door.

"Eph King, eh?" grunted Hashknife. "Oh, what a chance for the cattlemen, if they only knew it."

"We might capture him and get in good with the cows ag'in," suggested Sleepy.

"And plumb ruin our conscience," declared Hashknife. "We're goin' back to bed and forget what we've seen and heard."

They piled back into the hay, but not to sleep.

JACK HARTWELL faced Eph King and the man he had knocked down, with a cocked six-shooter. He was still a trifle hazy with sleep, but managed to keep them the width of the room away.

"What do you want here?" he demanded.

"I want to see Molly," said Eph King softly. "I heard tonight that she is in danger, Hartwell."

Jack turned toward the bedroom door to call her, but she had thrown a wrap around herself and was opening the door as Jack turned. She blinked at her father.

"Dad, what are you doing here?" she asked.

"Hello, Molly. I came to see yuh, that's all."

"But, Dad, don't you realize——?"

"I realized that my runaway daughter was in danger, so I came to find out just how real it is."

"It's real enough," said Jack bitterly. "And if any one saw you come here, it would be ten times worse, King. They'd hang me for havin' you in my house."

"They didn't see me, Hartwell. It's too dark for that. I've come down here to ask yuh both to go back with me. I can send you over into Sunland until this trouble is over."

"Well, that's fine." Jack's lips twisted sarcastically. "You'd like to make me out a traitor, wouldn't yuh? I suppose that would fit in with yore idea of gettin' even with Marsh Hartwell, eh?"

"It's better to be a live coward than a dead hero."

"Is it? You ought to know, King."

The big man's eyes hardened and he started toward Jack, but the big revolver in Jack's hand did not waver, so he stopped.

"Jack, don't do that," begged Molly. "Dad means it all for the best."

"For the best—yeah, that's true," nodded Jack, but added, "for himself."

"All right," King turned and looked at Molly. "You go with me, Molly. You can't stay here any longer. They've given you a hard deal, girl. Oh, I know all about it. They treated you like dirt because you happened to be my daughter, but I'll even things with 'em for that. By ——, I'll sheep out Lo Lo Valley, if it's the last thing I ever do."

"That's fine," laughed Jack. "Ever since I was a kid I've heard that you were goin' to do that, King. Women used to scare their kids by tellin' 'em that Eph King would get them if they wasn't good. That's what folks over here think of you."

The big man's fierce expression softened to one of pain. He looked at Molly for several moments before turning back to Jack.

"They didn't do that, did they, Jack?" he asked, half whispering.

"The —— they didn't!"

"They—they made 'em afraid of me—the little kids?"

King took a half step toward Jack, ignoring the gun. It is doubtful that he remembered the gun. Jack nodded emphatically.

"I've heard 'em say it, King. I've seen kids playin' a game. They'd draw straws to see who'd be King, and he'd have to run the gauntlet. They'd take slats——"

"Don't say that!" King rubbed the back of his right hand across his eyes, as if bewildered. "My ——! Even the little kids." He grasped the back of a chair to steady himself. "Why did they do that? I've never harmed a kid. Good ——, what do they think I am?"

"And they think the same of Molly, I suppose," said Jack wearily. "I didn't give her a square deal by marryin' her and bringin' her here. But I didn't think how it would be. I married her because I loved her, King. I didn't ask you for her. I took her. You would have interfered if you had known about it."

"No, Jack," King whispered his denial. "Molly had a right to her own happiness."

"Then why did you use her to spy on us?"

For several moments no one moved or spoke. Eph King looked at Molly, whose face had gone white.

"That's the rub," said Jack harshly. "—— knows I don't blame her, after what she's had to stand, but you should have known that she would be suspected. And you sent that note."

"That note?" King's voice was husky.

"The note that that man—" pointing at Mac—"brought. The note that caused me to cripple him, King. I got a corner off it, anyway. I reckon you were willin' to take any old kind of a chance to get information. You knew that the men of Lo Lo never hang women, so you used my wife.

"Oh, it don't matter much now, except that it will cause a few men to lose their lives, and the sheep will make a dust pile out of Lo Lo, like you promised. They've branded me a traitor, because Molly is my wife. I wanted you to know all about it, King. But I'm not runnin' away. I won't blame Molly if she goes back to you—but I'd—I'd miss her somethin' awful."

Jack turned and looked at Molly, as he finished speaking. She shook her head slowly, her eyes filled with tears.

"Well——"

King sighed deeply and moistened his lips with his tongue. He seemed undecided what to say. There was nothing arrogant about him now; nothing that would brand him as the hard fighting sheep king. He seemed to have grown suddenly old.

"I'm not going, Dad," Molly whispered.

"No, I don't suppose so," said her father dully.

He stared down at the floor for several moments. Then he looked up and shook his head.

"That was awful—about those kids," he said slowly. "I don't think I deserved that. I—I don't mind about the grown folks—but kids—little ones."

He turned toward the door, as if to leave the room. Mac stepped in front of him, opened the door and started outside, when there came the sound of a sudden blow, followed by the ringing report of a rifle. Mac spun on his heel and fell face-down on the floor.

HASHKNIFE and Sleepy had gone back to the hay, where they debated in whispers. Hashknife contended that it was none of their business if Eph King wanted to visit Jack Hartwell, but in spite of his contention, they got out of the hay and went outside the stable.

Once they thought they heard a horse traveling along the side of the hill behind them, but were unable to see anything.

"I don't feel right about it," whispered Hashknife. "Somethin' makes me nervous."

"Same here," grunted Sleepy. "Everythin' makes me nervous. By golly, I won't feel like myself until I get out of this danged country."

"Sh-h-h-h!" cautioned Hashknife. "Look toward the front fence. I seen somethin', Sleepy. —— the dark, anyway! Don't they ever have a moon around here?"

"I can't see anythin'," complained Sleepy.

"I can't see it now. Probably seein' things."

They remained silent, straining their eyes toward the fence, or where the fence should be, but there was nothing to be seen.

Suddenly the door of the house opened, throwing a beam of light into the front yard, and from out by the fence came a streak of orange-colored light, followed by the rattling report of a rifle.

Both Hashknife and Sleepy were on their feet in a moment and running toward the fence, regardless of danger. And beyond them, traveling parallel with the fence, ran the dim form of a man. Hashknife crashed into the fence and almost lost his feet, but righted himself in time to see this man mount a horse.

The man and horse were not more than fifty feet away, an odd shaped bulk in the night. Sleepy almost crashed into Hashknife, and their guns spoke almost at the same time. As fast as they could work their six-guns they fired. The flashes of the guns blinded them and made accuracy out of the question. Some one was running from the house toward them. A horse was galloping away into the hills.

"That horse ain't got no rider!" yelped Sleepy. "I seen him against the sky. C'mon, Hashknife."

"It's Hartley!" panted Jack Hartwell's voice. "Yoo-hoo, Hartley!"

"Yeah—all right!" yelled Hashknife.

Eph King and Jack ran up to them, questioning, panting from their run.

"Here he is," said Sleepy, lighting a match.

They gathered around a man, who was lying on his face in the sage, where he had fallen from his horse. A few feet away was his rifle. They turned him over. It was no one that Hashknife and Sleepy had ever seen; a man of about thirty years of age, with a thin face, large nose and a mop of black hair.

Hashknife glanced down at him and looked at Eph King, who was staring down at the face of the dead man.

"Who is he?" whispered Jack. "I've never seen him before."

"I—I don't know," said King, but Hashknife knew from the expression on the sheepman's face that he lied.

"Let's take him back to the house," suggested Hashknife.

The four of them carried him back and placed him on the floor of the ranch house, beside the body of the man called Mac. Hashknife looked at the other man and at Eph King.

"Bushed him, eh?"

"Mac just opened the door," said King slowly. "It could have been me."

"Was this feller gunnin' for you?"

King stared at Hashknife for a moment and shook his head.

"No. I don't understand it at all. Poor old Mac!"

Molly was standing across the room, leaning against the wall, and Hashknife nudged Jack.

"Take care of yore wife, Hartwell. This ain't no place for a lady."

Jack turned and crossed the room to Molly, while Hashknife faced King across the two bodies.

"I'm not tryin' to pry into yore affairs, King," said Hashknife coldly, "but a while ago you said you didn't know this man. Lyin' ain't goin' to help things, yuh know."

The sheepman's jaw tightened perceptibly, but his eyes turned away from Hashknife's steady gaze, as he said:

"What right have you got to call me a liar?"

"I don't need any right, King. I've always been able to back up what I say. Come clean, King; it's always the best thing to do."

King's gaze came back to the body of the man who had killed his companion, and rested there for several moments before he looked up at Hashknife.

"I did know him," he said slowly. "His name is 'Boomer' Bates. He used to be a railroad man—a brakeman, I think. But for the last few years he's been livin' in Sunland Basin."

"With what kind of a gang, King?"

King shook his head.

"Not very good."

"And what was his grudge against the man he killed?"

"Grudge? I don't believe that Mac even knew him."

"Hated you, did he?"

"Not for any reason that I knew."

Hashknife nodded. He knew that King was telling the truth.

"As long as there are so many questions to be asked," said Jack, "I'd like to ask you how you two fellers happened to be here at my place at this time of night?"

"Well," laughed Hashknife, "we were tryin' to get some sleep in yore barn, Hartwell. We've lost more doggoned sleep since we hit Lo Lo Valley than we have all our life. This sure is one place where it pays to keep awake."

"You are not Lo Lo cattlemen?" queried King.

"No-o-o. We got left here, thassall. Cattle train went away and left us sittin' on a sidewalk, but we ain't set down much since."

"Don't worry about us," assured Sleepy. "Instead of soldiers of fortune, we're cowpunchers of disaster. The only time we ever seen peace was one day when Hashknife found it in the dictionary. The question before us right now, is this: What will we do with these two bodies?"

Jack shook his head.

"I don't know. There's too much to be explained."

"Can't you two men take charge of them?" asked King.

"With the sheriff and every cattleman in Lo Lo Valley believin' that we're spies of the sheep interests?" grinned Hashknife. "We were down at Ed Barber's inquest and backed out of there with guns in our hands. We'd look well takin' these two men to Totem City and turnin' 'em over to the coroner."

"What makes them think you are spies?" asked King.

"I dunno," laughed Hashknife. "They've got to lay the deadwood on somebody, 'cause somebody told you that old Ed Barber was the man who had blocked yore efforts before, King. Accordin' to what I can learn, he sat in a cabin up there, where he could watch the slopes into Sunland Basin. Any time the sheep got above a certain level, he signaled the cattlemen, who corked the pass. Now, somebody squealed on the old man."

"That's how it is, eh?" King squinted thoughtfully. "Do they blame you for shootin' the old man?"

"Mebbe not the actual shootin'. Yuh see, they blame you for that."

"Is that so?" King sighed and looked down at the two bodies.

"I suppose they would," he said slowly. "I have known for a long time that there was some one who watched the slopes into Sunland Basin. But I've never tried to send my herds over the pass. Until a short time ago we've had enough feed in our own country, but the long drought—" He hesitated for a moment. "Have you any idea what it means for me to establish my herds in this valley?

"I know the cattlemen's views on the subject; I know what the law says about it. Possession means nine points in the law, so they say. Well, I don't know how it will end."

"I can see yore angle of it," said Hashknife. "And I can see what it means to the cattlemen. But what I don't understand is this, King: Why are yuh standin' still up there? Why don't cha come on down into the valley with yore sheep?"

King looked keenly at Hashknife, as if trying to read what was back of that pointed question. Then—

"The cattlemen have established a deadline."

"Yeah," nodded Hashknife, and turned to Jack. "There's only one way to take care of this matter—and that's the right way. You get us two horses to pack these bodies on, and we'll deliver 'em to the sheriff."

"But what will yuh tell him?" asked Jack.

"The truth. He won't believe it, but we'll tell it, anyway."

"And get thrown into jail."

"Might be all right," grinned Sleepy. "They can't shoot us in there."

They caught Boomer Bates' horse and got another from Jack. King and Jack helped them rope the two bodies to the saddles, and they started for Totem City.

"We're runnin' into a rope," complained Sleepy. "You danged fool; you gets heroic thataway and declares to tell the truth. It sounds fine. And in days to come they will likely find out that we told the truth, and the little children will come out and strew vi'lets on our graves on Decoration Day."

"They won't use no rope on us," grinned Hashknife. "Mebbe they won't believe us, and mebbe they'll talk real big; but me and you are goin' down there, talk the truth and then get so danged tough that they'll let us alone; *sabe?*"

"Uh-huh," said Sleepy doubtfully. "I'll betcha we can do that in Totem City. They sure get scared easy."

* * *

THEY were near the forks of the road, traveling along in the moonlight, when they met five riders, who had swung off the Arrow road and were traveling toward Jack Hartwell's place. They were Gene Hill, Skinner Close, Micky Hart, Mel Asher and Paul Dazey.

Hashknife tried to crowd past them with the two packed horses, but they swung their horses to block the road.

"Jist about who have we here?" asked Gene Hill. He had been drinking.

"F'r ——'s sake!" blurted Micky Hart. "Looks like a killin' has been done."

One of them dismounted and began lighting matches, while the others shoved in closer and looked at the bodies.

"Know either of 'em?" asked Hashknife.

"I don't," declared Hill. "Do any of you fellers?"

There was a general chorus of negative replies.

"Mind talkin' about 'em?" asked Micky.

"Down at Totem City I'll tell about 'em," said Hashknife. "The sheriff will probably want to know."

"Prob'ly," said Gene Hill dryly. "You are the two jiggers that made a getaway from the inquest, eh? I'll betcha the sheriff will be glad to see yuh. We've all been kinda lookin' for yuh."

"By golly, that's right!" exploded Mel Asher.

"And now that you've found us?" said Hashknife.

"Well," said Hill after several moments of silence, "we didn't want yuh so awful bad, yuh know. The sheriff kinda cussed a little, but as long as you're goin' down to see him, I reckon it'll be all right."

"Thank yuh," said Hashknife. "Mebbe you'd like to ride back and hear what I tell the sheriff."

"We ain't got time," said Asher. "We're on business. But at that, I'd like to hear what yuh tell him."

"Mebbe he'll tell yuh later," laughed Sleepy.

"It all depends," said Hill, and they moved aside to let Hashknife and Sleepy start on down the road.

As soon as the two cowboys and their pack horses had disappeared, Hill took a bottle from his pocket and passed it around. They were all half drunk, but there was no hilarity.

"That's enough hooch for now," declared Hill. "We don't want to be drunk. I'd sure like to know who them two dead men are. They don't belong around here."

"What we ought to have done is to make them two whippoorwills tell us all about it," said Paul Dazey. "We ain't got much sense."

"And if you'd 'a' seen them two fellers back out of the Arrow bunk-house, with their six-guns all set, you'd say it wasn't none of our —— business," declared Mel Asher. "We showed pretty good sense, if anybody rises up to ask yuh."

THE sheriff and Sunshine were both asleep in the sheriff's office when Hashknife and Sleepy hammered on the door. It was nearly morning, but not near enough for Sunshine to awake in good spirits. He came to the door, looked them over with sleepy eyes and wanted to know what in —— they meant by trying to knock down the door.

Hashknife led him out to the horses and showed him the two dead men. This served to jar the sleep out of Sunshine and send him back into the office, where he yelled at the sheriff—

"Hey, Sudden! Git up! There's been a eppy-demic."

"Epidemic?" queried Sudden sleepily. "Whatcha mean?"

"C'mon out and look at the dead ones. They're bringin' 'em in by the pack load."

The sheriff came out, sans socks and pants. He squinted queerly at Hashknife and Sleepy, as if wondering just what their attitude would be after what he had done to them at the inquest. Then he turned his attention to the dead men, while Sunshine aided him with matches.

"Bring 'em inside, I reckon," he said gruffly.

They carried the two bodies in and placed them on the floor, where the sheriff made a closer examination.

"Both of 'em dead," he decided.

"I'll betcha that's why they elected yuh sheriff," said Sleepy.

"Why is that?" asked the sheriff.

"Cause yuh catch on to things so easy. Some folks just kinda jump at conclusions, don'tcha know it?"

"Huh!"

Sudden got to his feet and walked over to a chair, where he sat down and looked at the two cowboys.

"Well?" he said. "I didn't expect to see you fellers ag'in!"

"You didn't think yuh scared us away, didja?" asked Hashknife.

The sheriff did not seem to know just what to say, so he said nothing.

"Didja ever see either one of these dead men?" asked Sunshine.

The sheriff shook his head.

"Not me. I'd kinda like to hear about it."

"Yo're goin' to," grinned Hashknife. "And don't intimate that I'm lyin' until after I tell the story."

"Is there any use of lyin' about it?"

"Well," Hashknife grinned softly, "I've been tryin' all the way from Jack Hartwell's ranch to think up a good lie, but I can't; so I'll have to bother yuh with the truth."

The telling of the story did not take long, as Hashknife did not embellish it in any way. The sheriff and Sunshine listened to every word, exchanging glances occasionally, but neither of them interrupted.

"What was King and this other man doing at Jack's place?" asked the sheriff, when Hashknife finished.

"I didn't ask him."

"And he knew this feller Bates, eh?"

"Yeah—seemed to."

"Why did Bates kill this partner of King's?"

"You better ask somebody that knows of their personal affairs, Sheriff. I brought the bodies in, thassall. Outside of my story, I don't know any more than you do."

"Uh-huh. Well, we'll have to take your word for it. There's a lot of men kinda lookin' for you two fellers. Some of 'em didn't leave here so long ago either."

"We met 'em," nodded Hashknife. "If they were lookin' for us, they've forgot all about it."

"My gosh, yuh didn't kill all five of 'em, didja?" blurted Sunshine.

"Only four," said Sleepy seriously. "The fifth one saw that he didn't have a chance, so he shot himself."

For a moment both the sheriff and deputy swallowed the story, but Hashknife's grin reassured them that Sleepy was joking.

"I—I wouldn't put it past yuh," said Sunshine.

"After what the sheriff did to us at that inquest, I wouldn't put anythin' past a human bein'," declared Hashknife. "It sure was one dirty trick."

"Aw-w-w-w, ——!" blurted the sheriff, confused. "I—you two——"

"Absolutely," interrupted Hashknife.

The sheriff's confusion greatly amused Sunshine.

"Went off half cocked, eh?" he said. "That's the trouble with Sudden. That's where he got his name; always gettin' himself into a jam. Never thinks twice—that's Sudden. That's where he got his name, I tell yuh. Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha ——!" snapped Sudden angrily. "You never got yore name because of yore disposition, that's a cinch."

"Aw, that's all right," said Sunshine. "One thing, I don't go and decide too quick on a thing."

"You ain't got brains enough to ever decide."

"Ain't I?"

"You sure as —— ain't."

"You never give me a chance to show what I can do."

"I know what you'd do."

"Well, I'd think first, I'll betcha."

"Well, go ahead and fight it out," laughed Hashknife. "We're goin' to hunt a place to eat some food."

"If I was you I'd fade out of Lo Lo Valley," advised the exasperated sheriff.

"And if I was you, I'd prob'ly be as poor a sheriff as you are," retorted Hashknife. "We don't need advice, pardner. If Lo Lo Valley wants us, you tell 'em we're eatin' breakfast. And if Lo Lo Valley wants trouble, we'll accommodate 'em, *sabe?*"

"Fight 'em all, eh?" sneered the sheriff.

"Yeah—and lick 'em," retorted Hashknife. "S'long."

They went up the street, walking stiff-legged and laughing at each other.

"Bad men from Bitter River," chuckled Sleepy. "I feel as tough as pelican soup. I'll betcha that single-track-minded sheriff thinks we're in earnest."

"If he don't think we are, he ought to try us," said Hashknife seriously. "I'm gettin' tired of bein' suspected as a sheepherder."

TOTEM CITY was beginning to wake up as they entered the restaurant. They were the first customers of the day, and the sleepy-eyed waiter was none too cheerful. Both Hashknife and Sleepy were badly in need of some sleep, so they drank many cups of black coffee, while the waiter sucked at an extinct cigaret and wondered why these two strangers persisted in staying around Totem City, when they were not wanted. He had heard them discussed considerable.

They had finished eating when old Sam Hodges came in. He had been talking with the sheriff, who had told him about the shooting at Jack Hartwell's place.

"It's a danged queer proposition," he told them. "A lot of them men at the inquest kinda want to salivate you two fellers. That shot yuh fired over our heads made 'em mad, don'tcha know it?"

"If they want us, we're here," grinned Hashknife.

"Sure, sure. But that ain't it, boys. I know yuh. They'd have one —— of a time puttin' their hands on yuh, but it would be fifty to one, don'tcha see? Now, you fellers show sense. Come out to the Bar 77 and hole up until this is over. There ain't nobody out there but the cook. ——, I don't want to see you fellers hurt."

"That's fine of yuh, Hodges," said Hashknife. "We appreciate it a heap. Yo're plumb white, but we can't do it. We've been shot at. And we never hole up after we've been shot at."

"Uh-huh." Old Sam squinted thoughtfully. "Well, it ain't none of my business. I ain't seekin' information, but I'll bet odds that neither one of yuh ever herded sheep nor worked for sheep outfits."

"Thanks," dryly.

"Yuh don't need to thank me."

"Hodges—" Hashknife slowly moistened the edge of his cigaret paper and shaped his cigaret carefully—"why is that sheep outfit standin' still?"

"Why? Huh! Well, the dead-line, for one thing."

"Been any shootin' up there?"

"A little. Nobody hurt—yet."

"Just a case of waitin', eh? Kinda hard on the ranches, ain't it? All the cowboys on the dead-line thataway."

"Yeah, I reckon so. But the roundup is over for this year."

"Uh-huh. Well, mebbe that's right. Seems to me that King ain't makin' a —— of an effort to break through."

"Maybe he's tryin' to outstay us. He's got pretty good feed up there. He shifted the line a little to the west, but not very much. It kinda looks like he wanted to swing west, but don't want to do it too openly. I'd like to get my hands on him."

"What would the cattlemen do to him, Hodges?"

"If they caught him? Well, I don't

know what they'd do. He's been hated in this valley for so long that the cattlemen would probably declare a holiday and hang him higher than a kite."

"Then it would be a continual fight, even if he did get a foothold in here, eh?"

"You bet. There'd be plenty of killin' as long as a sheep remained, Hartley."

They went out of the restaurant and down to the Totem Saloon. It was a little too early in the morning for much activity. None of them wanted a drink, so they sat down at a card table to smoke and talk. Swampers were engaged in mopping up the floors, while the bartender polished glasses and put the bar in shape for the day's work.

A swamper went out, carrying two big empty buckets. He stopped on the edge of the sidewalk and stared down the street. After several moments he turned and came back into the saloon.

"The sheriff must 'a' caught somebody," he announced. "They're takin' several people into the office."

Hashknife, Sleepy and Hodges hurried to the doorway. There were several saddled horses in front of the office, and Gene Hill was talking with Sunshine.

"Better go down and have a look," suggested Hashknife, and they moved across the street, heading for the office.

Hill saw them coming and spoke to Sunshine, who moved back to the open door. Micky Hart came into the doorway behind him, and the three of them watched the three men coming down the sidewalk.

"That's about close enough," warned Hill nervously.

"Close enough for what?" asked Hashknife.

"Close enough for you to come, stranger."

"What's the idea, Gene?" queried Hodges.

"Well, you all stop right there and I'll tell yuh. We caught Eph King at Jack Hartwell's place."

"You—you caught Eph King?"

Hodges could hardly believe this.

"Yo're —— right we did. And we caught Jack Hartwell along with him, too. The sheriff is fittin' 'em in cells right now."

"Well, I'll be ——ed!" exploded Hodges. "That sure is good to hear."

"They were headin' for there when they passed us," whispered Sleepy.

The rest of the cowboys came out with the sheriff, talking excitedly, but at sight of Hashknife and Sleepy they stopped talking. Several of them looked at the sheriff, as if expecting him to say something, but he remained silent.

"I hear yuh caught Eph King," said Hashknife easily. "Do yuh mind lettin' me talk to him for a minute?"

The sheriff laughed and looked around at the cowboys.

"He's got about as much chance of that as he has of talkin' to the King of England, ain't he?"

"Less than that," laughed Gene Hill.

"We might put him in, too," suggested Micky Hart.

"Yeah?" Hashknife grinned widely at Micky. "Yuh might. But it wouldn't be a healthy dose for the place, cowboy."

"You don't want to talk too much," warned Hill. "You two *hombres* ain't any too well balanced around here."

"Oh, all right," said Hashknife meekly. "We don't want to get into trouble."

"Haulin' in yore horns, eh?" sneered Hill. "Well, I knew——"

Hashknife started toward Hill, looking him square in the eyes. It was a bold move; a foolish move, under the circumstances. But it got results. Hill started to retreat, not realizing that he was on the edge of a two-foot-high sidewalk. His first backward step dropped his foot off the edge and he sprawled on his back in the hard street. It was such a shock that he made no attempt to get up for several moments.

Hodges laughed outright and the tension was relaxed. Even the sheriff grinned.

"And that ends the mornin' performance," said Hashknife. "It's a good trick—when it works."

He turned his back on the crowd and walked back toward the Totem Saloon. After a moment's scrutiny of the crowd, Sleepy turned and followed him, while Gene Hill got to his feet and swore with what little breath he had left.

Hashknife and Sleepy went to the Totem Saloon hitch rack, where they had left their horses, mounted and rode out of town toward the west. The crowd in front of the sheriff's office watched them and wondered where they were going. But none of them cared to follow. Anyway, they had captured Eph King, and that was quite enough for one day.

THEY adjourned to the Totem Saloon, where they proceeded to regale themselves with whisky and recite their own deeds of valor. Slim De Larimore rode in after ammunition and found Hork, the storekeeper, swearing a streak.

"Ammunition, ——!" he roared. "I got enough shells on that train last night to supply an army, and some dirty coyote broke into my place last night and stole the whole works! Holy gosh, they not only took the new shipment, but they took everythin' else!"

"And that leaves us in a fine fix," declared Slim angrily. "I'm almost out of shells, I tell yuh."

"Well, ——, I never stole my own ammunition!" wailed Hork.

Slim whirled and walked out of the place, while Hork called down curses upon the heads of those who had robbed him. He was a thrifty soul, was Hork, and it was the monetary loss, not the plight of the cattlemen which caused him to grieve so deeply.

Slim's thin face expressed deep disgust as he started across the street and met Micky Hart. Slim had eyes of a peculiar greenish cast, and when he grew angry they seemed to intensify in color. For Slim was not of the jovial type, and when Micky related the good news of Eph King's capture he did not enthuse greatly.

"We've got him," declared Micky, after relating the details. "He was with Jack Hartwell, so we hung ropes on Jack and brought him in, too. I reckon we've done pretty well, eh?"

"Why didn't yuh bring his wife?" asked Slim.

"Aw, ——, yuh can't do that to a woman, Slim. What the ——? We can find her any old time, and she can't do no harm now."

Micky bow-legged his way on across the street. Slim studied the situation for a while, turned away from the saloon entrance, went back to the hitch rack and mounted his horse. For several moments he sat there, deep in thought.

Finally he swung his horse around and rode down to the sheriff's office, where he dismounted. The sheriff met him at the door.

"Heard the news, have yuh, Slim?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"Didja hear about the shootin' at Jack Hartwell's place?"

"No. What was that about?"

The sheriff invited him into the office, where he showed him the two bodies. Slim looked them over closely, while the sheriff told him the story as told to him by Hashknife. Slim listened closely to the narrative, but made no comment, except to ask where these two strange cowboys were now.

"Rode out of here a little while ago, Slim. Dunno where they're goin'. By golly, I don't *sabe* 'em. They don't scare worth a ——, either."

"Uh-huh," reflected Slim. "Somebody stole that shipment of cartridges that came in last night. Hork's yellin' his head off over 'em."

"Broke into his place? Who in —— would do that, Slim?"

"That's the question, Sudden — who would?"

"The sheepmen couldn't, could they?"

"Not very likely."

"Uh-huh."

The sheriff grew thoughtful. Then an idea seemed to strike him.

"Slim, I'll betcha it was Hartley and Stevens. I tell yuh, they're here for no good. Yessir, that's some of their work. What time did them shells arrive?"

"On the train last night, I suppose."

"Hm-m-m! By grab, I'll bet they got 'em. Next time I get a chance I'm goin' to shove them into jail, I tell yuh. They've caused me all the worry they're goin' to. Want to see King?"

"Aw, to —— with him."

"Didn't know but what you'd like to laugh at him, Slim."

"Naw. I've got to be gettin' back. These crazy punchers chasin' all over the country, drinkin' liquor and capturin' people kinda busts a lot of holes in the dead-line. Next thing we know, we'll have sheep all over the street down here."

Slim went out, swung into his saddle and rode out of town, heading north.

EIGHT armed men were eating a belated lunch at the sheep camp when Hashknife and Sleepy rode their jaded horses up to the huddle of tents and dismounted. They had circled far to the west, beyond the guarded dead-line, to get past the cattlemen.

Under the circumstances it was a foolhardy thing to do; to ride into that sheep camp. A number of saddle horses were tied to the wagons, giving it the appearance of a cattle camp. The sheepmen ceased eating and received them with Winchesters in their hands; a hard-bitten lot of men, who handled their rifles with familiarity.

Steen, the foreman, was there, and met them as they dismounted. He and Hashknife looked keenly at each other for several moments.

"I'll betcha," said Hashknife slowly, "I'll betcha, if yuh had that bunch of hair off yore face, I'd call yuh Bill Steen."

"Hartley! You old, long-legged galliwimpus!"

Bill Steen almost threw himself at Hashknife, reaching out with both hands. They mauled each other with rough delight, while the sheepmen grinned and stacked their rifles.

"Well, dern yore old soul!" exploded Steen. "Long time I no see yuh, Hashknife."

"Plenty long," grinned Hashknife. "Yo're the last person I ever expected to see up here. Bill, when in —— did you turn to sheep?"

"About five years ago. Oh, I'm an old sheepherder now, Hashknife. It pays me better than the cows did. Well, how in —— are yuh?"

"No better than ever, Bill. This here excess baggage of mine is named Sleepy Stevens. Sleepy, you've heard me tell of Bill Steen."

Sleepy shook hands with him gravely.

"Yeah, I've heard yuh tell about him. You and him stole cows together, didn't yuh?"

"Yeah, we sure did," laughed Steen. "But what in —— brought you two fellers up here, I'd like to know? Lookin' for jobs? If yuh are, you've sure got 'em."

"Yo're just as comical as ever," declared Hashknife. "We're cowpunchers, you old blat-listener. Listen, Bill: We came up to tell yuh that yore boss is in jail at Totem City."

"Eph King? In jail?"

Hashknife explained in detail, while the sheepmen crowded near to find out how it had happened.

"That's sure a —— of a note," said Steen seriously. "I was afraid somethin' had happened to him, so I sent a man down there an hour ago to see if he could find out somethin'. This here sure is serious news, Hashknife. My ——, they'll hang Eph King."

"I'm kinda afraid they will, Bill. And they'll hang Jack Hartwell along with him."

"Why would they hang Jack Hartwell?"

" 'Cause they think he is a spy for Eph King."

"Oh, the —— fools! Jack Hartwell's no spy for us."

"He'll have to prove it, Bill."

"What'll we do, Bill?" asked one of the men anxiously.

"What became of Mac?" asked another.

"Mac got killed," said Hashknife. "A man named Boomer Bates shot and killed Mac. Bates is dead, too."

"Well, for the love of ——!" exploded a sheepman. "What did Boomer Bates shoot MacLeod for?"

"Mistook him for somebody else, I reckon. Were they friends?"

"Well, mebbe they wasn't friends, but they wasn't enemies. Mac didn't even know Bates, I don't think."

"And what in —— is Bates doin' over in this country?" wondered Bill Steen.

No one seemed to know just why Bates might be in Lo Lo Valley.

"There's a lot of things I don't *sabe*," observed Steen, "and one of 'em is this: Why did you fellers ride plumb up here to tell us that Eph King is in jail?"

Hashknife grinned and began rolling a cigaret.

"Bill," he said slowly, "I didn't know you were here. I'm not a —— bit in sympathy with the sheep, but I thought it might be worth my while to come up and tell you what had happened."

"Just how would it be worth yore while, Hashknife?"

"C'mere."

Hashknife led him out of earshot, where they squatted on their heels and blew Bull Durham smoke in each other's faces.

"Go ahead," grunted Steen.

"Bill—" Hashknife was very serious—"why did the sheep stop where they are?"

"Why?" Steen grinned. "Dead-line."

"Yeah? Well, that's fine. And what else?"

"Nothin' else, Hashknife."

"I see," Hashknife nodded and rubbed his long nose. "Bill, what kind of a jigger is Eph King?"

"Hashknife, he's one of the best yuh ever knew. Oh, I know he's a sheepman, and all that. He's got a bad name." Steen shifted his position and inhaled deeply. "If King was the tough ——

they've called him, we'd have sheep below Totem City by this time. But he don't want a lot of killin'. He's waitin'—well, I dunno."

"Waitin' for what, Bill?" queried Hashknife smiling.

"Well, he—he——" Steen faltered. "He thought it would be the best thing to do, Hashknife."

"All right, Bill. I reckon we'll be goin' along."

"Goin' back to Totem City?" asked Steen, as they mounted.

"Eventually," said Hashknife. "Got any word yuh want sent to King?"

Steen smiled grimly, but shook his head.

"Come and see me ag'in, both of yuh," he said. "There's always grub and a blanket waitin' for yuh."

"Thank yuh, Bill. *Adios.*"

THEY rode due east from the sheep camp, staying well above the deadline. Their horses were fagged from the long ride up the slopes; so they took things easy now. Sleepy did not question Hashknife, but wondered at the reason for the wide swing of the country. It was almost sundown when they came down Deer Creek and swung west again to pass the Turkey Track ranch.

There was no sign of life about the ranch, and they did not stop. A smoke was lazily drifting from the kitchen stovepipe, but that was the only evidence of recent occupation. They came back on to the old road, leading toward Jack Hartwell's place. Hashknife studied it closely and finally drew rein.

A coyote trotted out of a thick clump of brush below the road, looked them over for a moment and disappeared like a puff of gray-blue smoke. Hashknife reined his horse around and rode down to where the coyote had come out of the brush.

An offensive odor assailed their nostrils, coming, it seemed, from the tangle of brush. Hashknife dismounted and led his horse in through a natural trail to where he discovered the body of a horse, partly eaten by coyotes. Sleepy followed him in, and together they examined the animal. There was a brand mark on its right shoulder, which showed a well marked JN.

"That's the horse you downed that night," said Hashknife. "It's a wonder to me that they didn't cut out that brand."

They went out of the brush, mounted and rode on toward Jack Hartwell's place, keeping a close watch on all sides. They knew this to be hostile territory, and did not care to run into trouble. Their horses were too tired to show much speed, and the two riders were red eyed from lack of sleep.

They rode in at Jack Hartwell's place and dismounted. The front door was open, but there was no one in sight.

"Looks kinda queer around here," said Hashknife, as he looked in through the doorway.

There was an upset table in the center of the room, a smashed vase and a litter of odds and ends on the carpet. A rocking-chair, with one arm broken off, leaned drunkenly against the wall, and a window on the east side of the room, looked as if some one had shoved an elbow through the pane.

"Holy gee!" whistled Sleepy, as they surveyed the wreckage. "They must 'a' pulled off a wrestlin' match, when they arrested King and Jack."

"It sure looks like it," agreed Hashknife, as he crossed the room and peered into the kitchen.

"C'mere!" he called to Sleepy. "Somebody got snagged."

There was a well-defined trail of blood across the kitchen floor, leading out of the back door. They went outside and picked up the trail again. It led them straight to the corral, where they found a man, lying face down, almost against the fence.

He had been shot through the left side, below the heart, but he was still alive. They carried him carefully to the house, where Hashknife cut away his shirt and examined the wound, which had stopped bleeding externally. He was not a man that either of them had ever seen before.

"I'll betcha this is the man that Bill Steen sent down here to find Eph King," said Hashknife. "Now, what do yuh reckon he ran into down here?"

Sleepy got some water and they washed the wounded man's face. It was all they could do for him. They forced a few drops between his teeth and after a few minutes he opened his eyes, looking dazedly up at them.

"All right, pardner," said Hashknife. "Just take it easy and see if yuh can talk."

The man frowned, as if trying to remember. Hashknife gave him another drink, which he took greedily, although he was almost too weak to swallow it.

"Do yuh remember what happened?" asked Sleepy.

The man shut his eyes, and they thought he had fainted, but he opened them again. He tried to take a deep breath, but choked with the pain. Then he made the supreme effort and whispered—

"Ed—shot—me."

It was a very faint whisper, in which he added— "He—took—the—woman."

For a moment he tried to say more, but the words would not come. Then he seemed to relax instantly and his eyes closed. Hashknife got slowly to his feet and looked around.

"So Ed got the woman, eh?" he muttered. "Now, who in —— is Ed?"

"I wish we had some whisky," mourned Sleepy.

"What for?"

"To give him a shot. Strong liquor——"

"Wouldn't do him any good, Sleepy; he's dead."

"Well," said Sleepy vacantly, "I—the poor son of a gun. What'll we do with him?"

"Nothin', Sleepy. We can't keep on carryin' dead men to town. I'm tired of bein' a travelin' morgue, so I reckon we'll shut the door and leave him here for a while. It kinda looks like somebody by the name of Ed came along and took Hartwell's wife."

"My gosh, do yuh reckon he done that, Hashknife?"

"Yuh can't dispute a dead man, can yuh? We've got to find this here Ed person and get an explanation. C'mon."

They fastened the door, mounted their horses and rode on toward Totem City. It was growing dark now.

"If I ever get my sylph-like form between sheets, I'll never get up," declared Sleepy. "I'm plumb bug-eyed, I tell yuh. Night don't mean nothin' to me, except darkness. That Hartwell place is a hoodoo, I tell yuh. Every time we show up there we run into death. Well, why don'tcha say somethin', Hashknife? Do a little talkin', can'tcha?"

"Talk about what?"

"Anythin', dang it. I've got to talk, hear talkin' or go to sleep on this frazzle-legged bronc. If I fall off, don'tcha dare to pick me up. Just figure that I'm dead and lemme lay, cowboy. Why don'tcha sing? My ——, you'd sing at any other time."

"Cows!" exclaimed Hashknife, jerking up his horse.

The road ahead of them was full of cows, the slope below them was a moving mass of cows, and more cows were coming down a cañon and crossing the road. Hashknife dismounted and Sleepy followed suit. It was impossible to estimate the number of cattle that crossed the road ahead of them.

And behind them came riders, not visible against the darkness of the landscape, but audible. One of them snapped a bull whip, like the report of a small pistol. Then they drifted away in the night, leaving only the odor of dust and cattle. They were traveling in a southeasterly direction, as near as the two cowboys could judge.

"What do yuh make of it, Hashknife?" asked Sleepy as they got wearily back on their horses and went ahead. "Reckon it was within the law?"

"It didn't look like it, Sleepy, but my bronc is too tired to run away from trouble, and I'm too sleepy to shoot my way out of it. Anyway, I'm kinda losin' my affection for these Lo Lo cattlemen."

They stabled their horses at Totem City and went to a restaurant. Sudden Smithy was there with Sunshine. Sudden nodded curtly, and his face showed little enthusiasm when Hashknife and Sleepy sat down at his table.

Sunshine merely grunted and kept up a steady attack on his plate of food. Hashknife and Sleepy had noticed that there were quite a number of horses at the hitch racks: Evidence that all of the cowpunchers were not out at the dead-line. Sudden seemed slightly nervous and often squinted toward the front windows.

The waiter was just placing their food on the table, when in came Matthew Hale, the prosecuting attorney. He came straight to the sheriff, paying no attention to the other three men.

"Well?" said the sheriff coldly.

"I've been looking for you," said Hale. "Several of the men are over in Hork's place, and it's beginning to look dangerous. You know as well as I do that you can't keep King and Hartwell in jail without a specific charge against them. As far as I know there is nothing against them. They were not arrested by the law; merely kidnaped."

"All right," grunted Sudden angrily. "I, suppose yuh want me to turn 'em loose, eh?"

"I merely want you to comply with the law, Sheriff. It seems to me, that with all this shooting going on, and dead men, whose deaths have not been investigated, there should be something for the sheriff's office to do beside keeping men in jail, against whom there have been no charges made, who have never even been arrested."

Sleepy innocently clapped his hands by way of applause.

It angered Sudden. He whirled on Sleepy, who met his glare with an expression of angelic innocence.

"Ain't he the talker?" queried Sleepy. "Silv'ry tongued, and all that. No wonder they sends lawyers to Congress."

It was all said with such sincerity that Sudden turned and looked at Hale, as if wondering just what Hale had said.

"—— fool!" grunted Sunshine, his mouth filled with food.

"Mebbe," said Sleepy, "but he don't talk like one."

"I meant you," growled Sunshine.

"Check the bet," laughed Sleepy.

Hale was looking closely at Hashknife, and now he said to Sudden:

"These are the two men who—uh—went away from the inquest, are they not?"

"Yeah, —— 'em!" growled Sudden. "They're always around where they ain't wanted."

"If I remember correctly you made a specific charge against them at——"

"Now, just hang on to yoreself," advised Hashknife. "We've been charged just about all we're goin' to be. You bunch of narrow-headed Lo Lo-ites are up against enough real grief, without tryin' to fasten somethin' on to me and Sleepy Stevens. Yo're asleep, that's what you are. My ——, I dunno how you've prospered at all."

He turned on the sheriff.

"Who's Ed?"

"Ed who?"

"Just Ed. There must be somebody around here named Ed."

"Well, let's see."

Sudden frowned thoughtfully. He knew almost every man in Lo Lo Valley by his first name. Sunshine had lived there for years, as had Matthew Hale, but none of them was able to give Hashknife the slightest assistance.

"That is rather peculiar," said Hale thoughtfully. "In all the valley, I do not know one man by that name. There was old Ed Barber, of course."

"But he's dead," said Sudden. "Nossir, I don't know of one man by that name. What's the idea, Hartley?"

"I've got to find Ed—who ever he is, Sudden—because he's the man who killed another man at Jack Hartwell's place today, and took Mrs. Jack Hartwell along with him."

"What in —— are you talkin' about?" exploded the sheriff, getting to his feet." "Took Mrs. Hartwell and——"

"Set down," advised Hashknife. "Don't get excited. She's gone, thassall. The house looks like a cyclone had swept through it, and there's a dead man propped up on the sofy. Ed shot him, so he said, before he died. And he lived long enough to say that Ed took the woman. The woman must have been Mrs. Hartwell."

"For ——'s sake!" gasped Hale. "What is this country coming to, anyway? When they steal women——"

"Who was the dead man?" asked Sudden.

"I don't know," Hashknife shook his head. "He was one of King's men, who was sent from the sheep camp to find out why King didn't come back. Mebbe he tried to protect the woman and got killed."

"Yeah?" Sudden got to his feet, his jaw set tightly. "How in —— do you know all this, Hartley?"

Hashknife smiled at him, shoved his plate aside and rested his elbows on the table,

"Mebbe it's because I haven't lived here so long that I've got cobwebs in my brain and scales over my eyes, Sheriff. Another question: Who owns the JN brand?"

"JN? I don't know it. What's the JN brand got——"

"I'm askin' questions—not answerin' 'em. Have yuh got a brand registry at yore office?"

"Yeah, I've got one."

"Then let's go and find out where it is located—this JN outfit."

They paid for their meal and went outside. Hale was interested enough to go with them. As they crossed the street, going toward Hork's store, the sheriff stopped, with a muttered exclamation. It was too dark to distinguish clearly, but in the yellow lights from the opposite building, there appeared to be a number of horses in front of the sheriff's office.

"What the —— is goin' on down there?" wondered Sudden.

The sheriff grunted and started down the middle of the street, when, from a point about midway between them and the office, some one fired a gun. The shooter blended into the wall of the building and was not visible, and his shot was evidently fired into the air as a warning.

A moment later several bullets whispered past the five men in the street, and they all broke for shelter. Hashknife and Sleepy ran across toward Hork's store, while the others scattered separately.

Men came running out of the store, only to be driven back by a fusillade of bullets, which splintered the wooden sidewalks and bit chunks out of Hork's porch posts. Hashknife and Sleepy flattened themselves against the building. Here and there a door crashed shut, as men decided that the street was no place to be in that storm of lead.

And about a minute later a group of horsemen swept up the street from the jail, shooting promiscuously to drive every one off the street. A bullet smashed through a window beside Hashknife and Sleepy, and they dropped flat. But as the horsemen rode through the cross lights of the Totem Saloon and Hork's store, they saw the huge figure of Eph King, sitting straight in the saddle, leading his men out of the town where he was so badly hated.

The dust of the passing horsemen had settled before Totem City crawled out of their holes to see what it was all about. Hashknife and Sleepy ran down to the sheriff's office and found the sheriff and Sunshine in there viewing the wreckage. For once in his life, Sudden Smithy could not find words to express his feelings.

Both prisoners were gone. The front door of the office sagged on one hinge, and two of the cell doors had been sprung so badly that they would never function again. The sheepmen had left two big crowbars, an ax and ten pounds of dynamite. It was evident that they were prepared for any emergency.

In a few minutes the office was filled with inquiring men. Sudden Smithy finally recovered his powers of speech, and their questions were met by a flow of bitter profanity. Sudden had, at one time, been a muleskinner, and his profane vocabulary was almost inexhaustible. In fact, Sudden was in no condition to talk coherently of what had happened, so Sunshine told them that the sheepmen had smashed the jail and had taken away Eph King and Jack Hartwell.

"Yuh should 'a' known they'd do that," said a cowboy.

This was sufficient to send Sudden into paroxysms of profanity, as he congratulated the cowboy on his wisdom.

"Well, we should," agreed Sunshine, and this caused Sudden to choke on his own words and become silent.

"Jist about how did the sheepmen know that King was here?" asked one of the crowd.

Sudden looked at the speaker for a moment. He remembered that Hashknife and Sleepy had ridden out of town immediately following the locking up of King and Jack Hartwell, and he also remembered that Hashknife had seemed to know too much about the death of the man who had come to Hartwell's place looking for King. Then Sudden threw up his hand in a signal for silence.

"I'll tell yuh who told 'em!" he yelled. "The same men I accused of bein' King's spies last night."

Hashknife was almost at his elbow, and between him and the door, looking at a book, which he had picked up from Sudden's desk, while Sleepy was further back in the room.

As the sheriff spoke he whirled to grasp Hashknife by the arm, as if to place himself between Hashknife and the door, but Hashknife was fully alive to his danger, and when Sudden tried to jump past him, Hashknife's right hand whipped through in an uppercut, and the Lo Lo sheriff's teeth shut with a dull "*cluck!*" and he went down on his shoulders.

The sheriff had hardly hit the floor when Hashknife ducked out through the doorway, knocking a cowboy spinning along the wall. Sleepy sprang across the sheriff and tried to escape, but they fell upon him in a group, and he went down on his face, with half a dozen men on top of him.

The room was in an uproar, as others jammed into the doorway, trying to get a glimpse of Hashknife; but all they glimpsed was a rider going away from the Totem hitch rack. Whether or not it was the lean-faced cowboy they did not know. So they went back and helped the rest subdue

Sleepy, who was making life miserable for everyone concerned. But there is strength in numbers, and in a few minutes Sleepy was behind the bars of the only intact cell in the jail, while the sheriff held on to his jaw with both hands and swore through his nose. There were others who had suffered from Sleepy's toes and fists, and they were equally divided as whether to hang him right away or to wait until they all had a drink. The drink idea finally carried, and they trooped over to the Totem Saloon, leaving the sheriff and Sunshine alone in the office.

"You talked too —— much," said Sunshine with little sympathy. He had been kicked in the ankle.

"Ozz zhut 'p!" groaned Sudden.

"If yuh had any sense, you'd 'a' shot 'em both and then told the crowd what yuh shot 'em for. By ——, if I'm ever elected sheriff of this county, I'll show 'em."

Sudden did not think it worth while replying to Sunshine. It was difficult for him to talk, and he felt that all of his teeth had been driven at least an inch deep into his jaws. He got to his feet, kicked his chair aside and started for the door.

"Stay here," he ordered. "Goin' 'fter drink."

"Yeah, I'll stay here," snapped Sunshine. "But if them snake-hunters come and want to lynch that jigger—they can have him."

Sudden grunted and walked out. Sunshine rubbed his ankle, after removing his boot, and the pain made him wince. He had stepped into range of Sleepy's kicks, and now he cursed reflectively.

"Mary Sunshine!" called Sleepy. "Can I have a drink of water?"

Sunshine told him in plain profanity where he could go and get water.

"Got a mean disposition, ain't yuh?" laughed Sleepy. "What are you so sore about? Did you get hurt?"

"Well, I got kicked in the ankle, and it's all black-and-blue."

"Oh, excuse me," said Sleepy seriously. "I didn't mean to kick you, Sunshine."

"Well," said Sunshine doubtfully, "I dunno whether yuh meant to do it, but yuh sure done it real good."

He got up and limped into the rear, where he got a cup of water. He carried the oil lamp with him to the cell door and handed the cup to Sleepy. But it was not a hand that reached for the cup—it was the barrel of a big six-shooter that shoved out through the bars and almost punched Sunshine in the waist.

"Now," said Sleepy, "you open this door and be —— quick."

"Uh?"

Sunshine almost dropped the lamp. He did drop the cup, which clattered on the floor inside the cell.

"Wh-where did yuh-yuh get that gun?"

"Unlock that cell!" snapped Sleepy. "My finger itches, Sunshine."

The deputy's hand went gingerly to his pocket and he took out the key. The big gun fairly bored into his middle, as he leaned forward and unlocked the cell door. Then he stepped back and let the prisoner out.

"That's a lot better," said Sleepy, grinning. "I reckon I'll go out the back door and take you along with me. C'mon."

"I don't *sabe* where yuh got that gun," complained Sunshine.

"Foresight," grinned Sleepy. "I was afraid there might be a lot of foolish questions asked, with all them folks gatherin' around, so I put my gun inside my shirt. Mebbe it was a foolish thing to do, but I didn't want to have to kill somebody, yuh see."

"Yo're smart," applauded Sunshine as he preceded Sleepy out to the rear. "I s'pose Sudden will be sore as —— but he mostly always is, anyway."

"Now, you can go back with yore light," said Sleepy. "*Adios.*"

"So long," said Sunshine sadly.

He marched back into the building, carrying his lamp, while Sleepy ran swiftly back out of the narrow alley. He did not know where to find Hashknife, and was not going to try, but he was going to be sure that those cattlemen did not get hold of him in their present humor.

BUT Hashknife had not deserted his partner. He had "lifted" a good-looking horse from the Totem hitch rack, circled the town and tied it to another hitch rack on the opposite side of town and on a side street. Now he was planning just how to get Sleepy freed. He did not know what had been done to Sleepy, but he felt sure that Sleepy was in jail.

The crowd was drinking in the Totem Saloon across the street from him, which made him feel more sure that Sleepy was behind the bars. He could see the sheriff at the bar. No doubt they had decided that he—Hashknife—had left Totem City, so they would not be looking for him to show up very soon.

He had made up his mind to go down and stick-up the guards, when he saw Sunshine come out of the office and hurry diagonally across the street toward the Totem Saloon. Some men had come out of the saloon, and Sunshine met them. Hashknife strained his ears to hear what was being said. One of the men called to the sheriff, who came out, still caressing his sore jaw.

Came a low buzz of conversation, and then the sheriff's voice was raised in lamentation and profanity.

"Got away?" he wailed. "Had a gun inside his shirt? Gone?"

"I jist told yuh——"

Thus Sunshine angrily.

"Yo're a —— of a deputy!"

"You put him in!"

"Don'tcha blame me!"

They were talking at the top of their voices, so Hashknife sneaked away, laughing. Sleepy had escaped. By the light of a match Hashknife examined his horse and found that it wore a Bar 77 brand, belonging to old Sam Hodges.

"I've got a good horse and no place to go," he told himself.

He leaned against the hitch rack and tried to figure out what to do, but the lack of sleep had muddled his brain until he thought in circles.

"Got to have some sleep or lose my place in the procession." He rubbed his nose and considered things. He did not dare go to the little hotel, and he did not want to sleep out in the open. Then he got an inspiration. Leaving the horse at the rack, he went around back of the buildings until he came to the sheriff's stable. Cautiously he went inside and climbed into the loft. There was plenty of nice soft hay.

He crawled back to the rear and started to burrow down, when his hand came in contact with human flesh. It was a man's face. Hashknife's hand stole slowly back to his gun and he waited for the man to make a move. But instead of a move, the man said:

"Lemme alone, will yuh? 'S funny a feller can't sleep."

"Sleepy!" blurted Hashknife. "Is this you?"

"Go sleep. Who in —— do yuh think it is—Rip Van Winkle?"

And their snores blended thankfully.

MARSH HARTWELL was at home that night when Bert Allen, of the Circle V, rode in and told him of the jailbreak. Allen was on his way back to the dead-line, and stopped only long enough to tell what had happened in Totem City.

"And them other two jiggers got plumb away, too," declared Allen disgustedly. "The tall one knocked Sudden cold, swiped one of the Bar 77 broncs from the Totem Saloon hitch rack and hit for the hills.

"We caught the other one and threw him into a cell. But he had a gun inside his shirt, and when Sunshine brought him a cup of water he stuck the gun into Sunshine's ribs and made him unlock the door. They're kinda bad medicine, them two, Marsh."

"I wonder if they are workin' for King?" said Marsh.

"I'll be danged if I know. If they are, King's got two danged capable men, Marsh. Jist think of them two hangin' around all the time, with most everybody ready to take a shot at 'em. I'd sure hit for the timber, if I was them."

Mrs. Hartwell and Mrs. Brownlee had heard Allen's story. It was the first time that Mrs. Hartwell had known that Jack had been arrested. After Allen's departure, Marsh and the two women sat in the living-room of the ranch house; Marsh puzzling his mind over what to do; the two women waiting for him to speak.

"Well," he said slowly, bitterly, "I suppose that Jack is on the other side of the dead-line now—to stay."

"Could you blame him, Marsh?" asked Mrs. Hartwell softly.

"Blame him? Why not?"

"After the way he has been treated, Marsh."

The man sighed deeply, as he humped over his chair. He was physically and mentally tired, weary of the struggle. Just now he did not care if the sheep engulfed the whole valley.

"What about Molly?" asked Mrs. Hartwell.

Marsh looked up at her.

"What do you mean, Mother?"

"She's alone over there, Marsh."

"She's probably across the dead-line, too."

"Probably. But we don't know that she is. And you know that there isn't a more lonesome place in the valley. And more than that, Marsh: It isn't safe for a woman to be alone now."

"Jack isn't in jail now. He'd be with her."

"Would he? With every cattleman in the valley against him?"

"Even his own father," said Mrs. Brownlee dismally.

"No!" Marsh Hartwell threw up his head. "Don't say that! —— knows I'm sorry for what I've done to Jack. I hated Eph King so much that—well, it made me bitter to have my own son marry his daughter. I didn't realize what it meant, I tell you.

"I'm not against my own son! I've been against him—yes. I'm a big man in Lo Lo Valley. They say that Marsh Hartwell is the biggest man in this county. I know I am." His voice softened as he looked at the two astonished woman. "I'm big—in this valley—but I'm just findin' out that I'm a ——ed small man in my own home."

"Marsh!" Mrs. Hartwell got to her feet and crossed to him, putting her hands on his shoulders. "Marsh, you—you'll help Jack and Molly?"

"Yes, I'll help them, Mother—if they'll let me. It's awful late in the game to talk about helpin' 'em, but I'll do all I can to make up for what I've done to them."

He got to his feet, shoved her gently aside and started for the door.

"I'm goin' after my horse," he told them. "I'll see if I can coax Molly into comin' over here to stay until this trouble is all over."

He went out, leaving the door open. Mrs. Hartwell sank down in a rocking chair, burying her head in her arms. Mrs. Brownlee patted her on the shoulder, the tears running down her cheeks.

"Don't cry, Ma," she begged. "Don't cry about it."

"Cry about it?" Mrs. Hartwell lifted her old face, her eyes misty with tears. "Cry about it? I'm not crying—I'm laughing. It has taken your father twenty years to find out that God made him just like other men."

"Maybe," said Mrs. Brownlee softly, "Maybe dad has found out that he isn't such a big man after all, Ma."

"And maybe," said Mrs. Hartwell wistfully, "I have found out that he is bigger than he was."

CAME the scrape of a footstep on the porch, and they looked up at Jack, standing in the doorway, the palm of his right hand resting on the butt of his gun.

"Is Molly here?" he asked hoarsely.

"Molly?" His mother got up and came close to him. "She isn't here, Jack."

"Ain't she?" He leaned his shoulder wearily against the doorway, shaking his head. "I—I thought she might be. I just came from home. There's a dead man on the sofa, and the furniture is all upset. It wasn't that way when they took me and Eph King to jail."

"Didn't she leave any word, Jack—no note nor anything?"

He shook his head and came into the room.

"Where's Marsh Hartwell?"

He did not call him "Dad."

But before either of the women had a chance to reply, the sheriff and Sunshine Gallagher stepped through the doorway behind Jack. The sheriff held a gun in his hand. Jack turned quickly, his hand going instinctively toward his holstered gun.

"Don't do it, Jack," warned the sheriff quickly.

"Well, what do you want?" queried Jack coldly.

"Well, I dunno," Sudden Smithy seemed uncertain. "I—uh——"

"Don't move!" growled a voice at the door.

Marsh Hartwell was humped in the doorway, a gun tensed in his big hand, a scowl almost concealing his eyes. He looked like a big bear, reared on its hind legs, looking for fight.

"Don't move," he cautioned again.

"Who in ——'s movin'?" grunted Sunshine.

"Just don't," warned Marsh. "I seen you come, Sudden. Now, what do you want here? Better drop that gun on the table."

The sheriff tossed the gun on to the table, and relaxed.

"I don't know just what I did expect to find, Marsh. You know what happened tonight in Totem City, don'tcha? Hartley and Stevens got away, and I kinda wondered—we were headin' for Jack's place, but decided to come here first."

He turned to Jack.

"Have you been home?"

Jack nodded quickly.

"Is yore wife there?"

"No. That's why I came——"

"Hartley said she was gone. Was there a dead man——?"

"On the sofa." Jack came close to Sudden. "What do you know about it, Smithy?"

Sudden told him what Hashknife had said.

"Did he mean that some one had taken her away by force?" demanded Jack.

"I don't know. Did she know any one by the name of Ed?"

Jack shook his head quickly.

"There's nobody around here by that name, Sudden."

"Mebbe it's some of the sheep outfit," suggested Sunshine.

"But, if it was, why did he kill one of King's men? Hartley said the dead man was sent there to find out why King didn't come back. He lived long enough to say a few words, it seems."

"Well, who is this Hartley?" queried Marsh. "Every one talks about him and nobody seems to know for sure who or what he is. They say he's a spy for King, but——"

"That's a lie," interrupted Jack. "Eph King never seen either of them two fellers until just before they captured and took us to jail. I'll stake my life that they are not spies."

"They're somethin', that's a cinch," declared Sunshine. "It ain't reasonable to suppose that two men of their brains would be just bummin' around. Them two jiggers *think*. Stevens thought far enough ahead to hide a gun inside his shirt. By golly, that's lookin' into the future."

"Would they have anything to do with the disappearance of your wife?" asked Sudden of Jack.

"No. They're not that kind."

"If they merely got left by a train, why do they stay here and take all these chances?" asked Marsh. "What is there here for them? It don't look reasonable."

Sudden shook his head slowly.

"I dunno, Marsh. Somebody shot a horse—my horse—from under Hartley the night they came. I don't think they had any idea who it was, and it may be that they're tryin' to find out. I've had an idea that they were hired by Eph King, but mebbe I'm wrong."

"Well, we've got to find out what became of Molly," said Marsh, "and we'd better start right now. Goin' with us, sheriff?"

"That's what I'm hired for, Marsh. C'mon."

It did not take long for them to ride over to Jack's place. The sheriff examined the house, looking for a possible clue, which he did not find. Then he loaded the body of the dead sheepherder on to his saddle.

"There ain't nothin' we can do," he declared helplessly. "We ain't got a thing to go on."

"That's true," agreed Marsh.

Jack made no comment. He realized that it would be useless for him to go searching the hills for his wife. In fact, he was not sure that she had not gone of her own free will. He did not know any one by the name of Ed.

The sheriff mounted behind the dead man and they rode back to the Arrow, where Marsh invited Jack to spend the rest of the night. But Jack refused.

"I'm goin' to town," he decided. "I've got to find some trace of Molly. They'd know at the depot if she went away on a train. I'm not afraid of the cattlemen now."

And so Jack Hartwell rode back to Totem City with Sudden Smithy, Sunshine Gallagher and the sheepherder who had not lived long enough to tell who Ed was.

"YEP—took the whole —— stock. Never even left a box of .22 shells. Even took a couple boxes of ten gage shotgun shells. And, by gosh, them shells cost money! Yuh can't buy ca't-ridges for nothin', y'betcha. If I ever find out who took 'em, they'll sure think they're at a shivaree."

It was the following morning that Hork bewailed the loss of his ammunition to Hashknife and Sleepy. It was a blow from which he would never quite recover. Hashknife and Sleepy had crawled out of Sudden Smithy's stable, washed in the horse trough, and eaten a big breakfast at the restaurant.

Their escape from the cattlemen the night before had not seemed to teach them caution. They had heard Sudden and Sunshine ride away from the stable the night before, and later on they had heard them come back and unsaddle their horses. Sudden had talked about taking a dead man to Doctor Owen, so Hashknife decided that they had been out to Jack Hartwell's place.

A good sleep and a full meal had put new life into both of the cowboys, and they were ready for anything that Totem City might have to offer them. They had purchased some Durham from Hork, who swore that he was crippled from the loss of the ammunition, and that the profit on two sacks of Durham looked smaller to him than the thin end of nothing, whittled to a point.

"I heard about you two fellers last night," he told them. "I dunno whether yo're wise in stayin' here or not. Sudden don't quite figure you fellers out, and he said last night that when the gall was passed around, you two must 'a' been served first."

"We slept in Sudden's loft," grinned Hashknife.

"In his loft? Huh! Well, I reckon Sudden was right. Jimmy Healey was worryin' around about one of yuh swipin' his horse from the Totem hitch rack. He howled his head off, until he finds it around on a side street, and everybody swore that Jimmy was so absent-minded that he forgot where he left it."

A customer came in and engaged the attention of Hork, so Hashknife and Sleepy sauntered back to the front of the store. Two men had just ridden in and were dismounting at a hitch rack across the street. Jack Hartwell came out of the Totem Saloon and started across toward the store. He paid no attention to the two riders who crossed in close behind him.

As Jack reached the sidewalk in front of the store, the two men came up to him, and one of them made an sneering remark. Jack turned quickly and looked at them. They were Casey Steil and Al Curt, of the Turkey Track outfit. Hashknife stepped swiftly out through the open doorway, so softly that Curt and Steil did not hear him.

"Just what did you say, Steil?" asked Jack calmly.

"You heard me; didn't he Al?" Casey Steil laughed throatily.

"I wasn't sure," said Jack. "I'd want to be sure, Steil."

"Touchy, eh?" Al Curt spat thoughtfully. "Go ahead and tell him what yuh said, Casey."

"Since when did they start callin' you by a good Irish name?"

Hashknife spoke softly, but, from the way Steil and Curt whirled to face him, it might have been an explosion.

Curt's hand had made a motion, as if to reach toward his holster, but the hand and arm seemed paralyzed.

"Well, if it ain't 'Wide-loop' Curt!" exclaimed Hashknife. "Sleepy, c'mere and take a look. Introducin' Lee Steil and old Wide-loop, Sleepy. Gents, get used to lookin' at Sleepy Stevens."

Hashknife's eyes bored into the faces of the two confused cowboys, while behind him Sleepy laughed joyfully.

"Mamma mine!" he chuckled. "Only two like 'em in captivity, Hashknife. Somebody must have a taste for knickknacks."

"Couple of soiled souls," declared Hashknife seriously.

"What the —— is this all about?" demanded Steil angrily.

"Don't let yore lily-white hands get nervous," advised Hashknife. "Mebbe yore lips won't let yuh admit that yuh recognize us, but down deep in yore hearts, there's somethin' that tells yuh to be careful where yuh put yore hands—Casey Steil."

"Let 'em do as they please," said Sleepy, grinning. "I'd just like to see old Wide-loop forget that he's a shade too slow to take a chance. Casey acts like he had tonsilitis. He ought to try a cyanid gargle."

Jack Hartwell grinned. He knew that these four men had met before, and that there was something in the meeting now that boded no good for Steil and Curt. In fact those two worthies were wishing that they were far from Totem City.

"You ain't got nothin' on us." Thus Curt rather painfully.

"What made yuh say that?" grinned Hashknife.

"Yuh ain't!" declared Steil vehemently.

"You sure of that?" asked Hashknife softly.

Steil squinted narrowly at Hashknife for a moment. Then—

"—— sure."

"Then don't let me get anythin' on yuh, Steil. Yo're a dirty horse thief, a crook and a liar. I dunno what yo're doin' here in Lo Lo Valley, but I'm goin' to find out. And that same goes for Wide-loop Curt."

Jack stepped back, watching them closely for the gun play which did not materialize. Without a word, Curt and Steil turned, walked across the street and went into the Totem Saloon. Neither did they look back.

"And that," said Jack musingly, "beats anythin' I have ever seen. Steil and Curt are supposed to be gun fighters, Hartley."

Hashknife sighed deeply and turned to Jack.

"Didja find yore wife, Hartwell?"

"Not even a trace of her. My ——, I don't know where to look. She didn't leave here on the train last night. Just what did that man tell you before he died?"

Hashknife told him the exact words. Jack shook his head wearily.

"Not a man by that name in this country, Hartley. It might have been a sheepman, of course."

"Yeah, that might be," agreed Hashknife dubiously. "But if it was, why did he shoot the other one?"

"—— only knows, Hartley. I don't know what to do, where to look, or anythin'."

They moved back into the store and sat down on the counter.

"Where did you ever know Al Curt?" asked Jack.

"He's originally from Montana," said Hashknife. "We knowed him in Idaho. They called him Wide-loop up there. Steil used to be around Wyomin', Nevada, and maybe he nosed up into Idaho, too."

"They've been here about a year," said Jack, "but they've played straight, I think. They both work for the Turkey Track."

"Owned by the duke of somethin'-or-other, ain't it?" grinned Sleepy.

"Slim De Larimore. He's no duke."

"Steil and Curt work for him, eh?"

"Yeah. There's another feller named Allison."

"Allison? I reckon he's a stranger to us. I don't like to knock anybody, but I'd sure like to tip this De Larimore person off to watch Steil and Curt. They'd steal him blind if they had a chance."

"They'll not steal much from Slim. He's cast-iron, that feller. I'll betcha that nitric acid wouldn't faze him."

"Cold-blooded, eh?"

"Y'betcha. Good cowman, too. He's been here over two years. Bought the Turkey Track from Buck Fenner's widow. It wasn't much of a place at that time, but Slim has built it up pretty good. He's from Texas."

"Thasso?" Hashknife humped over and scratched his head thoughtfully. "Well, some folks do make a success. I dunno how they do it—I know danged well I can't."

He slid off the counter, drew a folded book from his pocket and said to Sleepy:

"You set here and rest yore face and hands while I take this brand registry back to the sheriff. I had it in my hand when they run me out last night."

"All right," grinned Sleepy. "Didja find out who owns that JN outfit?"

"Yeah, I found out. Feller by the name of Jack Noonan. Ranch is located on the other side of Sunland Basin."

"I've heard of him," said Jack. "They call him 'Calamity Jack.' "

"Well, that's a good name," laughed Hashknife, as he went out on to the sidewalk.

He looked toward the Totem Saloon, but did not happen to notice that Steil and Curt were mounting at the hitch rack. They had seen him come out of the store, and as he started down toward the sheriff's office, they swung into their saddles.

They were not more than a hundred feet from him, as they swung their horses into the street, and, without any warning, Steil drew a gun, jerked his horse to a standstill, and deliberately shot at Hashknife.

The tall cowboy jerked back, quickly crumpled at the knees and sprawled on the sidewalk. Steil's gun was lifted for a second shot, but now he whirled his horse and they went racing out of town in a cloud of dust.

Sleepy and Jack almost fell off the counter when the shot was fired, and ran swiftly to the door. There was only a screen of dust to show that the riders were leaving town. Several men had run out of the Totem Saloon, and Sudden Smithy was running up the street from the sheriff's office.

Sleepy was the first to reach Hashknife and turn him over.

"My —— where did he hit yuh?" panted Sleepy, his face white with the fear of losing his pal.

He began yanking at Hashknife's shirt, when Hashknife sat up and reached for his hat.

"Hey? What the ——!" blurted Sleepy.

"Stumbled," explained Hashknife. "Stubbed my toe." He got to his feet and dusted off his knees.

"Hello, sheriff—" handing him the brand registry—"this belongs to you, I reckon. I had it in my hand when they chased me last night, and I was bringin' it to yuh."

"Uh-huh." Sudden accepted the book

wonderingly. "Yeah, thanks. Now, what in —— was goin' on around here? Who was doin' the shootin'?"

"It was Steil or Curt," said a man from the Totem. "I wasn't where I could see which one it was."

"Was they shootin' at you, Hartley?"

"At me?" Hashknife looked blankly at the sheriff. "Oh, no. Why would they shoot at me? Prob'ly got a drink or two too many and wanted to see if a six-shooter would go off."

"Uh-huh."

The sheriff was not satisfied, but realized that he would never get Hashknife to admit anything he did not want to. He looked at the book, folded it up and frowned at Hashknife.

"I don't *sabe* you fellers," he declared complainingly. "Last night they were yellin' for yore blood and—maybe they are yet, for all I know—and you go around actin' like somebody had handed yuh the keys to the town. Ain'tcha got a lick of sense?"

"Not a lick," said Hashknife seriously. "When they passed around the gall we took so much that they passed us up on the brains. A feller can't have everythin', sheriff."

The sheriff's ears grew red. He knew that some one had told them what he had said about them. So he nodded in agreement, turned and went back to his office, wondering aloud what in —— Hashknife had taken the brand registry for. Then he remembered that they had talked about the JN outfit. He looked for it in the registry and found it belonged to a Jack Noonan. He threw the book aside and sprawled on a cot to finish out his interrupted siesta.

While the others accepted Hashknife's explanation, Sleepy knew that Hashknife had sprawled on the sidewalk for a purpose. The tall cowboy grinned seriously over his cigaret, as he led Sleepy and Jack to the livery stable, where they got their horses.

"We're goin' to take a little ride," explained Hashknife.

Jack made no comment. Something seemed to tell him to depend on this lanky disciple of the rangeland. Sleepy scowled for a while, but the scowl gave way to a knowing grin. He knew that Hashknife was inbued with an idea. Every inch of the tall cowboy bespoke the fact that he was riding for a purpose.

* * *

THEY went north for a short distance and then swung to the east, leaving the road and heading for Lo Lo River. And as they strung out in single file along on an old cattle trail, Hashknife lifted his voice in mournful song:

Old Bill was a pun-n-n-ncher
And you'll all agree-e-e-e
That a puncher's a man of low mental-i-tee-e-e.

Now Bill went a-ridin-n-n-n',
With a rope in his ha-a-and,
And by accident ropes one of his neighbor's brand.

Poor Bill was astonished
His error to fi-i-i-ind,
And the cowboys all said, 'Old Bill's goin' blind.'

So to save him from blindness-s-s,
They was kind—you'll agree-e-e-e,
They hung Old Bill up on a wha-a-ang-doo-o-dle
tree-e-e.

"And that," said Sleepy, "is probably different than even Caruso could have sung it."

"Anyway," said Hashknife seriously, "the sentiment is there. I may not sing very pretty, but I sure get rid of my song."

"I was just wonderin'," observed Jack, "just wonderin' where you are headin' for, Hartley."

"I dunno," confessed Hashknife. "I kinda wanted to get out to Turkey Track sidin' without goin' around by the road."

"Yeah, yuh can do that, but we'll probably have to swim the river."

"Thassall right," laughed Sleepy.

"This is Saturday."

"We should have gone east from town," said Jack. "Instead of comin' out here, crossin' the river at the bridge, we should have followed the railroad track. It wouldn't be very easy travelin', but we wouldn't have to cross the river."

"That's right," agreed Hashknife, "but everybody would have known where we was headin'. Yuh see, Hartwell, I like to fool folks. It's a lot of fun, don'tcha know it? And it's kept me and Sleepy from lookin' up at the daisy roots."

"Like when yuh fell down a while ago, eh?"

"Probably. I didn't want to down either of them jiggers. Right now they're worth more alive than dead, for my purpose. And they think I'm dead or badly hurt—which makes it much better. I dunno which one of 'em fired the shot. I heard the bullet hit the building about twenty feet ahead of me."

They crossed Slow Elk Creek near its mouth and came to the river, where they swam their horses across. From there it was only a short distance to Turkey Track siding, where they dismounted, tied their horses to the corral fence and sat down to have a smoke.

To the north they could see the timbered curves of Deer Creek, to the north and west the wide sweep of the Lo Lo range. To the north and east was the narrow, timbered valley, through which came the railroad from Medicine Tree, and beyond. Just across the river from them, about a mile and a half away, was the Turkey Track ranch, on the west bank of Deer Creek.

Hashknife seemed very thoughtful, as he scanned the country. He squinted toward the hazy outline of the main divide, where the break of Kiopo Pass was barely visible, and at the narrow valley to the northeast.

"Did yuh live here before the railroad came, Hartwell?" he asked.

"Yeah," nodded Jack. "It hasn't been here over six years."

"Uh-huh. Where did the cattlemen market their stock before they had the railroad?"

"Mostly in Medicine Tree. That was before the sheep got control of Sunland Basin. We used to take some big drives out of this valley."

"Over Kiopo Pass?"

"Mostly. A few tried takin' stock out through where the railroad goes now, but it was a pretty hard drive. The railroad had to blast their way in through solid rock and travel miles to gain a few hundred yards. Of course yuh could take stock out, but most of 'em would have their heels worn off before they hit Sunland. We've never been afraid of sheep comin' in that way."

"Any station or town between here and Medicine Tree?"

"Not until you get into Sunland Basin. Between here and there is a wilderness. Good grazin' land though. But the snow piles up too deep in there for any one to use it, except in summer; and in the spring it catches the drainage from both sides and comes —— a-whoopin' down Lo Lo."

Hashknife squinted sidewise at Jack.

"You worryin' about yore wife?"

"Well, my ——, wouldn't you?"

Jack got to his feet and leaned against the corral.

"I s'pose I would, Jack. Let's go over and strike the Turkey Track cook for somethin' to eat."

"Fine," grinned Sleepy. "Mebbe we'll see Curt and Spiers. I'd give a lot to see the look on their faces when they see you."

"Well, don't get so danged interested in their faces that yuh forget their hands. Them two sidewinders are liable to strike before they rattle."

"And they're not friends of mine," added Jack.

"What kind of a whipporwill is this Allison?" asked Hashknife as they mounted and rode toward the river crossing.

"I'd hate to say," replied Jack. "If somebody had asked me a week ago what I thought of Curt and Steil, I'd probably have said that they were as good as the average."

"Naturally. They tell me that you've had quite a lot of —— handed to yuh, Jack. I never got the story direct, yuh know."

"And you probably never will, Hartley. I'm not complainin'. I went into it with both eyes open, yuh know. Mebbe I was all wrong, I dunno. Dad is a hard man, and he tried to teach me to hate. Mother is just the opposite, so she taught the opposite.

"Lovin' got me some happiness and a lot of pure ——, but it kept me from turnin' killer, Hartley. I'm the only one who knows what the last—well, the last hundred years—meant to me. It does seem that long. I've stood insults that would make a cotton tail fight a grizzly bear. They've called me a yellow skunk—a sheep lover—and I never even reached for my gun."

"How about yuh now, Jack?"

"Now?" Jack laughed harshly. "I've got my war paint on. It's a showdown from now on. If you hadn't showed up when you did, I was goin' to start in on Curt and Steil. I haven't forgotten the draw. There's only one man in the country that can beat me, and that is Slim De Larimere."

"He's fast, is he?" asked Hashknife.

"Just like a flash. Wears his gun kinda in front of his thigh, carries his hand behind his holster, and his draw is just like lifting his empty hand. I've seen some gunmen, but he's got 'em all beat."

"Is he a good shot?"

"I don't know; never seen him shoot. Very likely is though."

Hashknife smiled seriously and rubbed

his nose. It was a sure sign that he was pleased. Sleepy watched him and grinned.

They rode in at the Turkey Track and dismounted. There was no sign of life around the place, except the Chinese cook who answered their knock.

"Hyah, John," grinned Hashknife pleasantly. "How's chances for a little food?"

"I do' no," replied the Celestial. "Boss no heah."

"Thassall right. You round up a little food for us."

"Mm-m-m."

John was not so sure. Then:

"You come in, eh? I make you li'l glub."

They filed into the living room and sat down, while the Chinaman got busy with his fire. The Turkey Track living room was not an attractive place; it was more like a bunk house. There were three beds, badly tumbled, a few chairs, a littered table, a scattered lot of playing cards and a ragged carpet, plentifully littered with ashes and cigaret butts.

The Chinaman was busily rattling his utensils and singing in a weak, high-pitched voice. Hashknife stepped over to the door, leaned against the wall and watched him. Suddenly he leaned forward, squinting toward the stove, and spoke softly—

"What's the matter, John?"

The Chinaman was putting some wood into the fire-box, but turned and looked at Hashknife.

"W'at yo' say?" he asked, blandly.

"About that wood," said Hashknife slowly. "Yuh can't burn green wood, John."

"No *sabe*."

The Chinaman looked at the stick of green cottonwood in his hand.

"Too green," said Hashknife. "Use dry wood."

"No *sabe*."

The Chinaman started to put the green wood into the stove, but Hashknife strode across to him, took the stick off the fire and tossed it out through the open door. Then he picked out some dry wood from the box beside the stove and stuffed it into the firebox.

"That burns fine," smiled Hashknife.

The Chinaman's face did not change expression, and he went back to his pots and pans. Jack and Sleepy had come to the doorway, watching Hashknife, who walked back into the living room with them.

"What was the idea?" queried Sleepy in a whisper.

Hashknife grinned seriously.

"That Chink knows that green wood don't make a good fire."

"Wanted smoke, eh?"

"That's the way it struck me."

"Wanted to send up a signal?" asked Jack.

"Might be. Yuh never can tell."

Hashknife walked back to the doorway and watched the Chinaman finish the cooking of the meal. He did not trust the cook. They ate the meal, but kept one eye on the Chinaman. Hashknife tried to draw him into conversation, but the Chinaman hid behind his "No *sabe*."

When they had finished, Hashknife walked over to the stove, filled the fire box with pitch-pine wood and went out into the yard, where he picked up the green stick. The Chinaman watched him put it into the stove, shut the fire-box door and sit down again.

"Whasamalla you?" asked the Chinaman. "Yo' say no can do——"

"Can do now," grinned Hashknife. "Plenty good smoke, eh?"

"No *sabe*."

The Chinaman shook his head violently.

"Nobody asked yuh to," said Hashknife, getting to his feet.

The three cowboys went outside, mounted their horses and rode away. A heavy smoke was curling up from the stove pipe, a smoke that would be visible for a long way. Hashknife chuckled joyfully.

"Slim De Larimere will probably see that smoke, and come a whoopin'. It's probably the signal that will bring 'em in from the dead-line, in case any strangers are around the ranch, and the Chink will get merry —— from his boss. So we'll just step off a piece and watch the effects."

As soon as they were well out of sight from the ranch, they rode into a brushy coulée, dismounted and sneaked to the crest, where they could get almost a bird's-eye view of the ranch house. The heavy smoke no longer rolled from the stove pipe, evidence that the Chinaman had removed the green fuel.

It was about half an hour later when two riders approached the ranch from the east. They rode boldly up to the house and dismounted.

"I'm bettin' that the smoke signal didn't bring them in," said Hashknife, but added, "unless the signal means that everythin' is all right. They busted right in, didn't they? Recognize the horses, Jack?"

"Not at this distance, Hartley. One of 'em is a light buckskin and the other is a rangy-lookin' gray. They don't belong to the Turkey Track, that's a cinch. Honey Wier rides a gray, but that man wasn't Honey Wier. And I don't know of anybody in Lo Lo that rides a light buckskin. There they come out again."

The two men had left the house and came out to their horses. The Chinaman was with them, and the three grouped together for several minutes before the two mounted and rode away. It looked as if they were going to ride past, which would give the three cowboys a chance to see who they were, but they turned and rode southwest, going down through a brushy swale and disappearing into the heavy cover.

"What's down that way?" asked Hashknife.

Jack squinted thoughtfully for a moment, "Well, I dunno. There ain't nothin' much. Looks like they were heading for the forks of Slow Elk and the river. Maybe they're goin' to Totem City. Just above where we crossed Slow Elk, there's an old shack and a corral. Anyway, there used to be. An old coyote hunter used it a couple years ago."

"An old shack, eh?"

"Yeah. Probably fallen down by this time. It's down there in a coulée, kinda out of the way, if it ain't fallen down."

"We'll take a look at her," said Hashknife, starting back to the horses. "In this game, yuh can't afford to overlook anythin'."

They mounted and followed Jack down through the timbered draw, which opened on to brushy hillsides.

"Take it easy," advised Hashknife. "We've got plenty of time."

"What do you expect to find down there?" asked Jack.

"Yuh never can tell, pardner. Just lead us in the slickest way."

It was about two miles from where they had mounted to where Jack led them over the crest of a broken ridge and pointed toward the brushy bottom below them.

"Yuh can see the top of the old shack, Hartley."

"And that ain't all," said Hashknife quickly. "Get down!"

They slid out of their saddles and forced the horses to move further back. Through the screen of trees they could see part of the old corral, where two men were working with horses. It was impossible to see just what was going on, but a few minutes later two men rode down the coulée, mounted on a black and bay horse.

The two men did not seem in any hurry; neither did they act in a suspicious manner.

"Recognize them horses?" asked Hashknife.

"Nope," Jack shook his head. "Lots of bays and blacks in this country. I wonder if it's the same two men."

"I think it is, Jack. Anyway, we'll soon find out."

They mounted and rode down at the rear of the shack, where they slid to the ground and approached the shack. In the little corral stood a light buckskin and a gray horse sweat-stained, leg-weary The door of the shack was unlocked and there was no one inside.

Of furnishings there were none; but on the floor were nine bed rolls, spread, just as they had been when nine men got out of bed and left them. Hashknife grinned at the amazement in Jack's face, and led them outside. They went to the corral and looked at the two horses. On the right shoulder of each animal was the mark of the JN outfit.

"More of the Jack Noonan stock, eh?" said Sleepy curiously.

"Yeah." Hashknife nodded seriously. "Been ridden to a frazzle, too. Well, this is worth findin', gents."

"But what does it all mean?" queried Jack. "I don't *sabe* it."

"C'mon," ordered Hashknife, heading back to the horses. "We don't want to be spotted here in this coulée."

They rode back to higher ground, where they drew rein and scanned the country. Not a living thing moved in that wide expanse of rangeland.

"Have you any idea what it means?" asked Jack.

"Haven't you?"

Hashknife seemed surprised.

"Not much, Hartley."

"Let me ask you an easy question, Jack. In all our travels today—and we've covered a lot of territory—how many head of cattle have you seen?"

Jack looked at Hashknife and his eyes

swept the hills in a bewildered sort of way.

"Why, I—by golly, I don't remember that we seen any. Say, that's funny! I wondered what was wrong."

"I didn't see any either," added Sleepy.

"Neither did I," said Hashknife, mimicking Sleepy. "Because there ain't any to be seen."

"But where in —— have they gone?" demanded Jack.

"Mebbe they've gone where the woodbine twineth and the cuckoo calleth for its mate. But they haven't!" Hashknife's jaw snapped shut. "Lo Lo Valley has been buncoed, Jack. While every cattleman and cowpuncher have cooled their heels on a dead-line against sheep, rustlers have cleaned out their cattle."

"My ——!" exploded Jack. "Do you think so, Hartley?"

"I know so. Me and Sleepy cut their trail the night we came here, and they killed a horse under me. We've seen 'em since then. It looks like this Jack Noonan has brought his gang from Sunland Basin over here to take advantage of the sheep invasions, and by grab, he's sure makin' a cleanup."

"What'll we do?" asked Jack helplessly. "There's a gang of 'em to contend with."

"And they know danged well that they won't dare to desert the dead-line," said Hashknife. "Jack, this bunch of cow thieves have got Lo Lo Valley by the neck."

"By ——, they sure have!"

"But, of course—" Hashknife grinned over his cigaret—"it ain't as though us three were losin' anythin'. Me and Sleepy ain't got no interests here, and they've handed you so much —— that they can't expect you to break yore neck to help 'em out. So—" Hashknife scratched a match and puffed on his cigaret—"So we'll just step aside and let 'em find it out to their sorrow.

"They've kinda handed me and Sleepy the worst of it, too. We've been accused of all kinds of things since we showed up here. They even wanted to hang us, I reckon. And, takin' it all in all, we don't owe 'em anythin'—none of us, eh, Jack?"

Jack squinted thoughtfully and looked away across the hills. Hashknife and Sleepy exchanged a quick glance and waited for Jack to speak. Finally he turned to Hashknife.

"I suppose yo're right," he said slowly. "They've kinda given you two the worst of it, and I know how you feel about it. You ain't got no interests here—nothin' to care about—so it's all right. But with me—" Jack looked away for a moment, and back at them, with a wistful, apologetic smile—"Yuh see, I was raised here, and these are my people."

Just that and nothing more. He had explained in a few words. Hashknife nodded slowly, a serious expression in his gray eyes. Then he suddenly held out his hand to Jack.

"You —— kid!" he said seriously as they shook hands.

"You don't blame me, do yuh?" asked Jack wonderingly.

"Blame yuh?" Hashknife laughed, joyfully. "I just been wonderin' if you was worth helpin', Hartwell—and yuh are. Let's go!"

* * *

MARSH HARTWELL leaned against a rear wheel of the chuck wagon in Six Mile gulch and looked moodily at Honey Wier and Chet Spiers, who were seated on the ground, cutting sticks of dynamite into proper lengths for their purpose.

Grouped around them were old Sam Hodges, Cliff Vane, Frank Hall and Bill Brownlee, each man with a cup of coffee in his hand. The chuck wagon had been shoved into the brush, until only the rear end was visible, and the little clearing in which it stood was so well masked by brush that it would not be visible from fifty yards away on any side.

"How about that for a bomb?" asked Honey Wier, holding up a bundle of short pieces of dynamite, from which a five-inch fuse projected. "That ought to make a mutton stew, eh?"

"That's the ticket," nodded Vane. "We'll give every man a load of 'em, and we'll blow all the —— sheep back into Sunland in one night. How do you like the idea, Marsh?"

Marsh Hartwell lifted his head,

"I don't like it, Cliff. Perhaps it's the only thing to do, but I don't like the idea."

"Sure it's the only thing to do," insisted Vane. "We can't spend the rest of our lives around here, waitin' for Eph King to start ahead. My idea is to start an offensive. With dynamite, we can bust up the whole works, scatter the sheep—mebbe capture King again. Anyway, we'll make'em so sick of Lo Lo Valley that they'll be willin' to get out with a whole skin."

"Yeah, that's true," agreed old Sam slowly. "A lot of fool cowpunchers will probably get killed with their own bombs, too."

"The idea is to bust straight through to the sheep camp, ain't it?" asked Frank Hall.

"That's it," replied Vane. "We'll wreck everythin' between here and there, too. Make up all our bombs here and distribute 'em all along the line. We'll draw Slim and his men over to this side of Slow Elk, and that'll give us about twenty men to throw dynamite. Oh, we'll show Eph King the way back to Sunland, y'betcha."

"Well, I wish you'd help make bombs and not brag so —— much," complained Honey Wier. "Me and Chet can't make 'em all."

"Don't bite the caps into the fuse," advised Hodges. "Pinch 'em in with the point of your knife, Honey."

"Aw, that's too slow. I ain't never bit too short on one yet."

"And yuh never will—except just once. Yo're only allowed one mistake, cowboy."

"And that's the truth," nodded Chet. "I knowed a feller that was bitin' caps on to fuses, and he caught the end of one between his back teeth."

"Hurt him much?" queried Honey.

"Hurt him? It drove his legs into hard ground up to his knees and his hat didn't come down until the next day."

"Loan me yore knife," said Honey seriously. "I'm scared I might git my arches busted down."

A horseman was coming in through the narrow trail, and they waited for him to come into the clearing. It was Abe Allison. He dismounted and helped himself to some coffee.

"Glad yuh showed up, Abe," said Vane. "Saves us a trip down to yore end of the line."

"Yeah?" Allison blew on the hot coffee. "What for?"

"To tell Slim what we're goin' to do, and have him bring all you fellers up this side of Slow Elk. Tonight we're goin' to bust our way through the sheep and settle everythin'."

"How?"

"Here's how," laughed Honey Wier, holding up a bomb. "We're goin' to shake the old hills, Abie."

"Dynamite?"

"Y'betcha," replied Vane.

Abe shook his head nervously.

"I'm scared of that stuff. Yuh never can tell what she's goin' to do. It ain't noways reliable, I tell yuh."

"Aw, ——, it won't hurt yuh," said Honey Wier, carefully poking the point of his knife through the copper detonator to secure it to the fuse. "All yuh got to do is to touch off the fuse, wait a second or two, to see that she's fizzin' properly, and then heave it as far as yuh can toward the sheep."

"And what'll them sheepherders be doin' all this time?"

"Shootin' at yuh, of course," laughed Chet. "But they can't shoot straight in the dark."

"Prob'ly kill a few of us," observed Honey sadly. "But, as has been wisely said: There is no diligence without great labor. I read that in my copy book when I went to school. I dunno what in —— diligence is, do you, Chet?"

"Killin' sheepherders. Diligence is a Latin sayin'. D-i-l is the same as 'kill'; *sabe?* I-g-e-n-c-e is what the Lats used to call a shepherd. I used to talk it kinda good, but I've forgot a lot of it."

"You used to live with 'em didn't yuh, Chet?" asked Vane.

"Yeah," nodded Chet seriously. "I'm a blood brother of that tribe. Say, this dynamite is gettin' sticky."

"That's the nitroglycerin thawin' out," said Brownlee. "I dare either of you fellers to clap yore hands."

"Yeah, and I'm goin' to get out of here," Allison mounted his horse. "Shall I tell Slim, Marsh?"

"Yeah, yuh can tell him what we're goin' to do. Mebbe it would be better for him to show up here about nine o'clock tonight. We won't take a very wide swath the first time. It might be that we'll have to attack more than once."

"All right."

Allison glanced apprehensively at the pile of fused bombs beside Honey Wier, swung his horse around and rode quickly away.

"By golly, I'd like to throw one behind him in the brush," grinned Honey. "He'd die of fright. I'll betcha Abie Allison ain't goin' to be worth a lot to us. How danged many of these things will we need?"

"Ought to have about ten for each man," said Vane.

"Yeah?" Honey counted what they had already made. There were ten. "All right, gents, I've made mine, so step up and help yourself."

"Aw, you're doin' fine, Honey," applauded Vane. "Keep right on. I never did see better bunches of dynamite in my life. I was just sayin' to myself, 'Honey Wier sure does *sabe* how to make up them bombs.' "

"You talk to yourself quite a lot, I know that," grinned Honey. "You keep it up for a while, and you'll prob'ly go into the sheep business yourself, Cliff."

"Here comes somebody else," grunted Brownlee, whose ears had caught the sound of approaching horsemen. "Several of 'em, too."

The crowd around the chuck wagon moved apart and watched the trail, where Hashknife, Sleepy and Jack were coming into view. No one spoke to them, as they dismounted, but every one of the cattlemen's faces betrayed their astonishment. Jack walked around to his father and glanced quickly at the circle of wondering faces.

"You can let yore guns alone," said Jack slowly. "We're not lookin' for trouble —we're bringin' yuh some."

"Bringin' us some?" Marsh Hartwell spoke wonderingly.

"Yeah—bringin' yuh some," said Jack.

"Is it about Molly?"

Jack shook his head quickly,

"I don't know where she is."

He turned to Hashknife.

"You tell 'em about it, Hartley; it's yore story, anyway."

"It ain't much to tell," said Hashknife, "and only amounts to just this: While all you cattlemen have been settin' here on the dead-line, waiting for the sheep to try and cross, somebody has been rustlin' every danged head of cattle in this end of Lo Lo Valley, thassall."

"What!"

Cliff Vane came toward Hashknife, his mouth half-open, a foolish expression on his face.

"How do you know this?" demanded Marsh Hartwell harshly.

The men crowded closer, swearing softly, asking for proof.

"Oh, there's proof enough," said Jack. "You can ride the hills all day between here and Totem City and never see a head of stock. I tell you Hartley is right. We found where the rustlers live. It's in that old shack down in the coulée near the mouth of Slow Elk. There's nine bed rolls in that old shack."

"Good ——!" exploded Marsh Hartwell. "That's why the sheep haven't moved! Boys, it's a game to loot Lo Lo Valley. Eph King and his gang forced us to guard the dead-line, while he stole all our cattle. The dirty thief!"

"Nine of 'em in that shack, eh?" gritted Vane. "Well, we'll just go down there and shoot —— out of 'em, eh? C'mon, boys."

"Wait a minute," said Marsh. "They won't be there now."

He turned to Hashknife, squinting at the serious-faced cowboy, as if seeking to read his thoughts. Then,

"Hartley, yo're on the square about this?"

Hashknife's eyes narrowed, but his lips twisted slightly in a smile, as he said:

"Hartwell, I'm tellin' you my opinion. I might be wrong, but I'm not lyin'."

"Where do you come in on the deal?" asked Cliff Vane.

Hashknife looked at Vane, a look of contempt that he made no effort to conceal, as he said:

"Pardner, you've lived here so long, seein' the same things, thinkin' the same thoughts, that you've become so —— narrow that yore squinty little brain can't conceive of anybody doin' humanity a good turn, unless there's somethin' in it, some chance to feather yore own nest."

Vane blinked angrily. Honey Wier guffawed loudly and slapped Chet so hard on the shoulder that the foreman of the Arrow almost fell down.

"What do yuh mean by them remarks?" demanded Vane.

"Ne'mind," said Honey. "He wouldn't get it, unless yuh wrote it out on paper, Hartley.

"Who the —— are yuh hittin' around?" demanded Chet. "My ——, you ain't got no feelin's a-tall, have yuh, Honey? Some day I'm goin' to pack a club for you."

"I'll use it on yuh," nodded Honey, laughing.

"Aw, quit foolin'!" snorted Vane. "We've got to decide —— quick on what to do about this. Where are these cattle, Hartley?"

"I don't know," replied Hashknife. "Perhaps they are on their way into Sunland Basin."

"Through the railroad route?" queried Chet.

"They haven't gone over Kiopo Pass," said Jack.

Marsh Hartwell swore feelingly,

"We might have known that Eph King was up to some dirty work. There has been a reason for his delay in tryin' to put sheep below the dead-line."

"We're between the —— and the deep, blue sea," said old Sam Hodges. "King knew he had us cinched. Any time we go chasin' after our cows he'll put the sheep across. And I'm bettin' that he'll know when we start after the rustlers."

"Yeah?" Vane drawled his question and looked meaningly at Hashknife and Sleepy. "I'll bet he will, too, Sam. Mebbe he's gettin' tired, waitin' for us to find it out."

Hashknife got Vane's meaning. He knew that the others got it, too. They shifted uneasily. Hashknife grinned at Vane and shook his head sadly.

"Pardner, you've got a thin soul. Somebody hinted that me and my friend were employed by Eph King, and you accepted it as the truth. Yore brain can't hold more than one idea at a time, so I'm not goin' to make yuh feverish by provin' anythin'."

"Don't bother with him, Hartley," advised Jack, and then to his father, "Hartley is tellin' the truth. I'd stake my life that he is not workin' for Eph King."

"You ought to know," growled Vane.

"Yeah, I ought to know!" Jack whirled angrily on Vane. "I do know. Now, —— yuh, put that in yore pipe and smoke it!"

Marsh Hartwell stepped in between them, shoving Jack back.

"This is not the time to fight each other," he said calmly. "I believe that Hartley is doin' this for our good."

"Let him prove it, and I'll apologize to him," said Vane sulkily.

"I don't want an apology from you," smiled Hashknife. "Keep 'em to use on yourself; you need 'em."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" howled Honey Wier. "Better'n a circus!"

Cliff Vane glared at Hashknife, but said nothing more. Marsh Hartwell turned to the other cattlemen,

"Boys, if this tale is true, and I reckon it is, we're up against a stiff proposition. The rustlers have likely shoved a lot of our stock half way to Medicine Tree by this time, and they know that we don't dare desert this dead-line.

"None of us have a title to enough of this range to stop the sheep from occupying it, except by force. We can't fence against 'em. Now it's just a question of two evils—sheep or the loss of our cattle. There's at least nine of the rustlers. If we even match numbers with 'em, it'll weaken our line badly. Now, what's to be done?"

The cattlemen shook their heads. Old Sam Hodges dug savagely into the dirt with his cane, and turned to the sober-faced group.

"Boys," he said slowly, "we've mistrusted Hartley and Stevens, and we've done our darndest to mistreat 'em. Right now some of yuh still think they're crooked. Yeah, yuh do. But just to show yuh how I feel about it, I'm suggestin' that we ask Hartley what to do about this proposition—and foller his idea."

"I'll tell yuh how I ——" began Vane, but Honey Wier interrupted him with,

"Oh, you be ——ed! We know how you stand, Cliff."

"I'm satisfied to do that," said Marsh Hartwell slowly.

"Same here," laughed Hall. "That skinny cowpuncher don't look crooked to me. Hop to it, long feller."

Hashknife grinned and hitched up his belt,

"Yo're askin' me to do somethin', gents. I never asked for a chance to untangle yore hay-wire situation. Mebbe I ain't got no better idea than you have, but, if yo're willin' to trust me, I'll do the best I can."

"How soon do yuh start, and can I go along?" queried Honey Wier. "I'm tired as —— of makin' dynamite bombs."

"Dynamite bombs?" said Hashknife.

"We're goin' to attack the sheep tonight," explained Hall. "And every man will carry an armload of dynamite."

"Oh, I see," muttered Hashknife. "Well, yuh may not have to do anythin' like that. Have all the men got their bombs ready?"

"Yo're danged right they ain't," laughed Honey, "and if they wait for me to make 'em up, they never will have."

"We're all goin' to meet here about nine o'clock tonight and get ready for the attack," said Marsh Hartwell. "Perhaps it would be best to smash the sheep pretty badly and then go after the rustlers. While the sheepmen are recovering from the battle, they're not liable to try and drive their sheep."

"No, that ain't the idea," said Hashknife thoughtfully. "I've been doin' a lot of thinkin' lately, and the success of my idea hinges on one thing. I can't tell yuh what it is now, and it may look to you like I'm crooked, but I'm takin' that chance.

"Go right ahead with yore dynamite idea. If I'm wrong, I'll throw a few hunks of it myself, but don't throw any until yuh hear from me. C'mon, Sleepy."

They climbed on to their horses, while the cattlemen watched them, wondering where they were going, what they were going to do. But they asked no questions. Vane grumbled profanely, but turned back to the coffee pot, while Hashknife and Sleepy rode out through the brushy trail, swung straight north and rode across the dead-line, heading toward Eph King's sheep camp.

No one challenged them. If any of the sheepherders saw them they kept out of sight, knowing that two men would be taken care of by those at the rear.

BILL STEEN and Eph King were just riding into camp as the two cowboys topped the hill above them. There were at least ten other men there, eating a meal, who deserted their food at sight of the two cow-boys; but at a sign from Steen they went back and sat down again.

Hashknife and Sleepy dismounted, shaking hands with Steen, who introduced them to King.

"We've met before, but not socially," smiled King. "Bill was tellin' me that you were up here to see him. I had an idea that you two might be responsible for me bein' in Totem City jail, but Jack didn't think so, and Bill wanted to make me a big bet that I was mistaken."

Hashknife grinned and shook his head,

"I never put a man in jail, unless he deserved it, King."

"Then yuh don't think I deserve it, Hartley?"

"I didn't think so. Right now I don't know what to think. Either you ought to be hung—or——"

"Or what?"

King looked curiously at Hashknife. The sheepmen heard what Hashknife said, and one of them eased himself into a position whereby he could draw a gun. The others looked at each other, and eating ceased.

"What did yuh mean by that, Hashknife?" asked Steen.

"C'mere."

Hashknife led them away from the diners. Once out of earshot, he squatted on his heels and began rolling a cigaret. Steen sat down against a boulder and accepted a smoke, while Sleepy stretched out full length and yawned wearily. King did not sit down.

"All right, Hashknife," said Steen. "Tell us what it's all about."

"Yeah, I'm goin' to do that, Bill. I came all the way up here to tell yuh; but before I tell yuh all about it, I'd like to have yuh tell me why yuh haven't made any attempt to break through. You've been here too long. There's a reason why, Bill; and I want to know what it is."

"Of what interest is that to you?" asked King.

"A whole lot," said Hashknife quickly. "And by givin' me that information, I can probably save yore sheep, mebbe a lot of lives, and I can put the deadwood on the guilty men."

"Save my sheep?" King smiled. "Save 'em from what?"

"Nobody answered my question," reminded Hashknife.

"What if they don't?"

"Then we'll have to ride away from here, thinkin' that you are the lowest coyote alive, Eph King."

King's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"Yo're in my camp, Hartley. Maybe you won't ride away."

"Now wait a minute," begged Steen. "Don't anybody go off half-cocked." He looked up at King. "I know Hartley, Eph. He ain't the kind to say a thing like that without a good reason, and we've got to get this thing right."

"All right," growled King grudgingly.

"Thank yuh, Bill," said Hashknife. "Now tell me why yuh didn't try to force the sheep through."

"Because it would be suicide, Hashknife. The plans went wrong. You know as well as I do that we can't get through."

"Thasso?" Hashknife smiled thoughtfully. "And yo're waitin' until somebody finds the hole for yuh to crawl through, eh?"

Steen and King exchanged glances.

"Yuh might figure it like that," said Steen. "There's no use in sacrificin' thousands of sheep and a lot of men."

"That's true," nodded Hashknife. "Somebody ruined yore scheme, did they?"

Neither of the sheepmen denied it. Hashknife turned to King.

"Did you know that Jack Hartwell's wife has been missin' since yesterday afternoon?"

"Missin'?" King stared at Hashknife. "You mean that somethin' has happened to her?"

Hashknife described the condition of the house, and of finding the dying man.

"That was Preston!" exclaimed Steen. "By ——, that's what happened to him. What did he say, Hashknife?"

"He said that Ed shot him, and that Ed took the woman."

"Ed who?" asked King anxiously. "Who is Ed?"

Hashknife shook his head.

"We don't know, King. There ain't a cowman in Lo Lo named Ed. Jack hasn't the slightest idea where she is."

King straightened up, his jaw shut tight, his big hands clenched at his sides.

"By ——, I'll find her," he said painfully. "She's had all the —— I'll ever let her have in this ——ed valley. That's one of the reasons I wanted to come down here and sheep 'em out. Just to show 'em, that's all."

"And that ain't all," said Hashknife slowly. "While you and your sheep have been holding the attention of the cattlemen, a bunch of rustlers have been quietly liftin' every head of stock in Lo Lo Valley. And yo're goin' to be blamed for it all, King."

"Wait a minute," breathed King, squatting down on his heels. "Say that again, Hartley, will yuh? Rustlers cleanin' out the ——"

"That's what I said, King. Do you know the JN outfit?"

"Jack Noonan? Sure I know him."

"Their horses carry his brand."

King slowly turned his head and looked at Steen, who was staring at him.

"And that ain't all," said Hashknife. "You could 'a' shoved yore sheep through that line any old time yuh wanted to. There ain't over twenty men on that line at any time."

Steen squinted at Hashknife and spat thoughtfully.

"Is that right, Hashknife?"

"Would I lie to you, Bill?"

"No, by ——, I don't think you would."

"And so they think I'm a thief, do they?" gritted King. "They branded me a thief years ago; so it's easy for them to slap on the old brand again. They think that I'm holdin' 'em on this dead-line while my men sneak in behind 'em and take their —— cows. By ——, that's a good idea, too good for me to ever think of doin'."

Steen got to his feet and threw away his cigaret.

"I can see the whole —— thing, Eph," he declared. "I've been afraid that somethin' was wrong."

He turned to Hashknife.

"You know where to find these rustlers?"

"I know where their bed rolls were today."

"Good!"

"All right, Bill," said King firmly. "I reckon you're right. Down there in Lo Lo Valley the women have used my name to scare their kids, and they've mistreated my little girl."

He turned away and started down across the hills, his lips shut tightly. Then:

"I don't owe 'em anythin', but by ——, I'm not goin' to have anybody stealin' in my name—makin' me blacker than I am. Tell the boys to get their horses, Bill. We're goin' across that dead-line to help the people that hate us." He turned to Hashknife, a whimsical sort of smile on his big face. "I reckon this kinda fits in with that idea of turnin' the other cheek, Hartley."

"Sometimes it helps, King," said Hashknife. "I've never lost much by helpin' an enemy."

"I never did help one," said King slowly. "Marsh Hartwell is the only real enemy I ever had. We were friends once, me and Marsh. But I reckon we both wanted to be the big man of Lo Lo Valley, and one of us had to quit.

"The country was new then, Hartley, and we were a rough gang. There wasn't any law and order, and the man with the longest rope got the biggest herd. Mebbe —" He smiled softly— "my rope was longer than Marsh's and he got jealous.

Anyway, I went out with the brand of thief. Bill is gettin' the boys together, so we better get ready."

They turned and walked back to the camp, where men were shoving rifles into their scabbards and saddling horses, which they were bringing out of the brushy cañon above the camp. And there was a grin of anticipation on the faces of these sheepmen. They were tired of inaction. King glanced at Hashknife and Sleepy's saddles, and called Steen's attention to the fact that neither of them carried a rifle.

Steen handed each of them a rifle and a belt filled with cartridges.

"Noonan travels with a tough gang," he told them. "Boomer Bates was one of his men. I can see the whole plot now. King didn't want to believe it, but he does now. C'mon."

They mounted and went down across the brushy hills, fourteen strong, well-mounted, heavily armed, looking for trouble.

* * *

AND about the time that the fourteen men rode away from the sheep camp, Marsh Hartwell and his son rode away from the chuck wagon in Six Mile gulch. The cattlemen had decided to wait until nine o'clock before starting their offensive, taking a chance that Hashknife's scheme, whatever it might be, would work out.

About a mile south of the camp they met the sheriff and Sunshine, who were seeking the latest news. They got it. Sudden rubbed his nose until it looked like an over-ripe cherry.

"By ——, I've been expectin' this!" declared Sunshine.

"You never expected nothin'," snorted the sheriff. "Don't say that yuh have, 'cause yuh haven't."

"You don't know what's inside my head," persisted Sunshine.

"The —— I don't! Just like I know what's in the hole of a doughnut. Don't argue with me about anythin', Sunshine. Lemme think. By grab, this is serious, don'tcha know it? Whole bunch of rustlers, eh? In that old shack down there—hm-m-m! Well," bravely, "there's just one thing to do, and that's to go and heave some lead at 'em."

"Don't do it," advised Marsh quickly. "That would chase 'em away, don'tcha see, Sudden? We've got to nail that whole gang at once; put enough men down there to stop every one of 'em, *sabe?*"

"And let Eph King send his sheep across, eh?"

"We got to take that chance, Sudden."

"And Eph King knows it, I'll bet."

"You'll probably win."

"Uh-huh. Say, Marsh, let's take a little sashay down that way. We can kinda act like we wasn't goin' nowhere. Them jiggers are liable to pick up their beds and pull out."

"Let's do that," suggested Jack. "Let's do somethin' besides talk. My ——, I can't stand it much longer."

"You ain't heard nothin' from your wife?" Thus Sunshine.

Jack shook his head sadly.

"I'm afraid—now. With that bunch of rustlers around here, it's hard to tell what has happened to her. That sun is almost down—and she's been gone since yesterday. C'mon."

They rode down through the hills, swinging to the east of the Arrow ranch, taking a course almost directly between the Arrow and Jack's place. There were no cattle in sight. Ordinarily the hills were filled with Arrow, Turkey Track and Circle V cattle in that part of the range, but there were none of any brand now.

Suddenly the sheriff drew rein and pointed excitedly. About a mile away a group of horsemen were riding swiftly in the direction of the rustler's shack. It was impossible to tell who they were or how many men were in the crowd, but they were making good time, and going almost away from the sheriff's crowd.

"There they go!" blurted Sunshine. "And they're goin' like ——! I'll betcha they're wise to somethin' and are beatin' it for the shack to get their stuff."

"It sure looks like it," agreed the sheriff nervously. "We're not exactly equipped for battle, but we'll give 'em a run for their money. Hit the grit, boys!"

Only the sheriff and Sunshine had rifles, but Marsh and Jack gave no heed to this, as they sent their horses into a swift run down through the hills. The brush whipped into their faces and tore at their clothes, but they stood up in their stirrups and prayed that their horses would keep their feet over the rough going.

Then came the *spang!* of a distant

rifle shot, echoing through the hills. It was followed by a scattering volley.

"Somebody has jumped 'em!" yelled the sheriff. "Ride 'em high and keep goin'!"

BUT what the sheriff had thought was the rustler's gang was Hashknife's crew from the sheepcamp. He had led them straight through the deadline unchallenged, much to the wonderment of Eph King. No one even questioned their right to pass, and Hashknife knew that the word had not been passed to let them through, because no one knew that he was going to bring a crowd back across the line.

Hashknife had taken them east from the sheepcamp until almost due north from the Turkey Track ranch, and then had twisted to the southwest, crossing Slow Elk Creek and turning south.

Hashknife, King and Steen had talked over what they were going to do, and decided to sweep down on the shack, kill or capture all the rustlers in sight and then ambush the rest when they came. It was a good scheme, and might have worked fine, except for the fact that two men were at the corral and saw them top the crest of the coulée.

One of these men had a rifle in his hand and he proceeded to take a snapshot at them before running back toward the shack. The sheepmen jerked to a stop and fired a scattering volley at the two running men, which did nothing more than kick up the dust or tear splinters off the side of the shack.

Then they dismounted, scattered in the brush and started to surround the shack, when several riders broke from cover farther down the coulée and rode away at breakneck speed. They were evidently on their way to the shack when the first shot was fired. Hashknife took a long-range shot at them, but they were traveling fast through the brush and his bullet did not stop any of them.

Those in the shack were not at all idle. They were all armed with rifles, and they were making things warm for the sheepmen. Hashknife and Sleepy crawled to a spot where they could shoot at a window, and proceeded to flip the old curtain with such regularity that the rustlers quit using that window as a loophole.

"This here is worth waitin' for," grinned Sleepy. "I wish I had my old .45-70, Hashknife. This here .30-30 is all very fine, but them bullets mushroom too quick. They don't bore through them old weathered boards. It's like throwin' rocks down there."

Wham!

A bullet struck just in front of Sleepy, filling his eyes with dirt. He rolled over, clawing at his face, trying to blink the gravel out of his eyes.

"Somebody throwed the rock back at yuh, didn't they?" asked Hashknife humorously. "You forget that there's desperate men in that shack, cowboy,"

A man ran out of the shack and headed for the corral, where several horses were tied. Twice he swerved, when bullets whizzed past his ears, but before he could reach the horses he lunged sidewise and went flat on his face.

"Must be gettin' hot inside the shack," observed Hashknife, as he stuffed some cartridges into the loading gate of his rifle. "I feel sorry for them poor —— down there."

Sleepy squinted through his tears and spat painfully.

"Go ahead and feel sorry for 'em, if yuh want to, Hashknife. And if yuh happen to have any sorrow left, pass it around to one whose vision is filled with dancin' stars. Talk about spots in front of yore eyes!"

Hashknife turned his head and looked back up the slope. Eph King was running toward his horse, and as Hashknife watched him he climbed into his saddle and spurred into a gallop. Hashknife squinted wonderingly. King was traveling rapidly now, and Hashknife watched him crossing the ridge behind them.

Four other riders had come into sight, riding in from the west, and traveling fast, as if attempting to cut in ahead of King. One of them fired a shot, and it appeared to Hashknife as if King almost fell off his horse.

"Stick here and keep shootin'," ordered Hashknife, backing out through the brush. "I've got to make a call."

Sleepy blinked through his tears at Hashknife, who was running low toward his horse. Sleepy wiped his stinging eyes with the back of his hand and settled down again.

"I'll stick here," he said aloud. "But I won't guarantee to do any shootin'. That danged cow thief down there almost rocked me to sleep."

HASHKNIFE reached his horse, mounted on the run and spurred away in the direction taken by King. He topped the rise, riding high in his saddle, but could see nothing either of the pursued or the pursuers. He remembered that there had been several riders below the old shack when the battle started, and he wondered if they had circled to attack them from the rear.

But Hashknife did not waste much time in speculation. As fast as his horse could run they went across that broken land of sage and greasewood, heading northeast. He could not hear the shooting now. It was slightly uphill now and the horse was tiring fast, but Hashknife showed no mercy on his mount.

Off to the east, beyond the next ridge, several shots were fired, but Hashknife did not alter his course. He tore his way up through the brush and swung on to the old road. He drew rein long enough to scan the country, but there was nothing in sight. Then he spurred on, heading toward the Turkey Track.

Again he heard the faraway snap of a shot; too far away to interest him now. At the same spot where he had watched the Turkey Track with Sleepy and Jack Hartwell, he dismounted and left his exhausted horse, head down in the greasewood thicket.

A cautious scrutiny of the Turkey Track ranch house showed him that there was no one in sight, so he circled to the left, keeping himself concealed, until he was almost at the rear of the place. Then he ran swiftly across the open space at the rear of the house and slid into the willows along Deer Creek. For several moments he remained quiet, watching the house. He had been forced to cross in the open, and there was a possibility of being seen.

Satisfied that no one had discovered him, he went swiftly down through the willows until he was at the corral. Just beyond was the big stable, and about a hundred feet beyond was the bunkhouse, a low building. To the right was the ranch house.

Hashknife leaned against the corral fence and looked at the horses. There were seven of them, nosing around at loose wisps of hay. Hashknife grinned as his eyes shifted to four of them, which seemed little interested in anything. Cautiously he worked around the side of the corral and went over to the stable, where he glued his ear to a crack.

Satisfied that there was no one in the barn, he circled the building, with the intention of taking a look at the bunk house; but the fairly close sound of a revolver shot caused him to draw back and run around to the opposite side, where he peeked around the corner.

A black horse, now almost white with lather, stumbled into the yard, its rider swaying sidewise in the saddle. It was Eph King. Behind him came Marsh Hartwell, Jack Hartwell, Sudden Smithy and Sunshine Gallagher. The sheriff drove his horse in close to King and caught the big sheepman before he could fall from his saddle. The others were off their horses immediately and helped place King on the ground.

Hashknife did not leave his position. Some one yelled a question from the bunk house, and Hashknife saw Slim De Larimore, Curt, Steil and Allison running from the bunk house to the group around King.

Hashknife jerked back and began rolling a cigaret, while his eyebrows drew together in a frown of concentration. He lighted the cigaret and peeked out again. The crowd was still standing around the prostrate figure of King, and Hashknife could hear them arguing over what had happened. Sunshine was talking loud enough to have been heard a quarter of a mile away.

"I suspected that King was the leader of the rustlers. By golly, we sure got him, didn't we? Eh, Slim? Sure gave us one awful run."

"That's all right," said Marsh Hartwell. "But I want to know who is doin' all that shootin' down there. Eph King was probably the leader of the rustlers—but who drove him away? It wasn't our gang."

Hashknife stepped away from the stable and walked toward them. Jack and Sunshine were facing him and saw him coming, but neither of them gave any indication of it. Hashknife was unhurried, smoking calmly on his cigaret. The sheriff was talking now.

"I dunno, Marsh. Mebbe it was some of

our gang. We better leave King here under guard and go back."

"One of my men will take care of him," said De Larimore, and turned to see Hashknife standing within twenty feet of him.

"Not one of yore men," said Hashknife calmly. "That would be too easy, Ed."

Slim De Larimore did not move. Curt and Steil were close together at Slim's left, with Allison behind them. Slim's eyes shifted sidewise, as if looking for a way out, but he did not even move his feet. They thought Hashknife had either been killed or crippled.

"Ed?" said Jack Hartwell in a strained voice. "Hartley, did yuh call him Ed?"

"That's his name," said Hashknife evenly. "Ed Larrimer. I dunno where he got the De Larimore. Mebbe he got it like he usually got his horses, cows and saddles."

"What do you mean?" breathed the owner of the Turkey Track.

"Just what I said, Larrimer. Long time I no see yuh, eh? I seen Curt and Lee Steil before. They call him 'Casey' Steil, I hear. Well, a feller has a right to his name, I reckon. But names don't mean nothin', except that a feller by the name of Preston knew you as 'Ed'. You killed him, but yuh didn't kill him quick enough.

"Always be sure that yore man is dead, Larrimer. Dead men tell no tales. And yuh didn't change yore name enough. Larimore and Larrimer ain't so different. And somebody told me what yuh looked like, acted like, and they said yuh was from Texas."

"—— you, what do yuh mean?" gritted Larrimer. "My name is De Larimore, and I own this ranch. I can prove it——"

"You don't need to, Ed. Anyway, it's too late for proofs. We are engaged with somethin' kinda interestin' now, and we don't care what yore name is nor whether yuh own the Turkey Track, or not. What I want to know right now is this: Where is Jack Hartwell's wife?"

Larrimer's elbows jerked slightly and he twisted heavily on one heel, as if bracing himself.

"What in —— would I know about Jack Hartwell's wife?" he asked thickly. "I've got all the——"

"I asked yuh where she is, Ed," reminded Hashknife coldly. "You ain't the kind of a man that would steal a woman—but yuh did. Now, —— yore dirty heart, where is she?"

Larrimer shrugged his shoulders helplessly and turned to the sheriff.

"Where did you find this —— fool?" he asked. "He's loco."

"He sure is crazy." Thus Casey Steil anxiously.

"After it's all over, we'll find her, Jack," assured Hashknife confidently. "Just remain where yuh are. We've got to kinda hurry things up, 'cause King has got to have a doctor."

"He'll be lucky if he ever gets one," growled Marsh, wiping his sweat-stained face with the sleeve of his shirt. "Any dirty rustler that——"

"He's no rustler," said Hashknife quickly. "Eph King is pretty much of a gentleman, Hartwell. When he found out that a gang of cow-thieves were takin' advantage of you cattlemen, he led his gang down here. And they're down there at that little shack, bustin' up that crew of rustlers right now."

"Brought his men?" queried Marsh with astonishment and unbelief in his face. "Was that what the shootin'——?"

"That's it, Hartwell. I came with 'em. My pardner is down there now, helpin' them sheepherders to wipe out the rustlers."

"Why did King run away?" asked the sheriff.

Hashknife had never taken his eyes off Larrimer and his men, who remained motionless.

"He didn't run away," said Hashknife. "I seen him start, and I knew why he started. He wanted to catch the men who were responsible. We got to the shack too quick, I reckon. Four of the gang hadn't quite reached there, and was able to make their getaway.

"If some of yuh will take a look at four of them horses in the corral over there, you'll see that they came home real fast. Eph King was headed for the Turkey Track, when you headed him off. He knew where the leader of the gang was headin' for, Sudden. You fellers made a mistake in throwin' lead at Eph King, 'cause he was merely comin' to collect from the man who had double-crossed him—Ed Larrimer, the man who planned the scheme that would put every cowman in Lo Lo Valley on a dead-line, while him and his crew from the JN outfit looted Lo Lo Valley. Hold still, Curt! Easy everybody!

"Ed, you and yore gang killed old Ed Barber. Boomer Bates mistook MacLeod for me or Sleepy, and killed him. Yore gang broke into Hork's store and stole them shells, so that the cattlemen would be short of ammunition. And you killed Preston. He knew you as Ed Larrimer. Mebbe you was afraid that Jack Hartwell's wife might tell what passed between you and Preston at Jack's ranch, so you killed Preston and kidnapped Jack's wife. Now, you murderin' pup, what do yuh say?"

For several moments Larrimer did not move nor speak. Then he straightened slightly, wearily and turned to the sheriff.

"Sudden, I've never heard so many lies in my life. I don't even know half what he's talkin' about. The man is crazy."

Larrimer's voice was absolutely sincere, convincing. Sudden cleared his throat and shifted his feet, while Jack looked imploringly at Hashknife, who was still tensed, grinning. King was trying to sit up, bracing his hands against the ground.

"Help him, Jack," urged Hashknife softly.

Jack went quickly to King and lifted him to a sitting position. The big sheepman turned his white face to the crowd, staring at every one. Then—

"I heard," he said hoarsely. "Hartley knows. I don't know how he knows—but it's true. I——"

Ed Larrimer darted sidewise, drawing his gun, realizing that King was able to prove too many things against him, but his hand jerked away from his gun and he whirled completely around, when Hashknife's bullet smashed into his shoulder. Curt tried to jump behind Marsh Hartwell, but the big cattleman smashed him in the ear, knocking him sidewise and into Steil, who was just pulling the trigger on his six shooter.

Steil's gun and Hashknife's sounded as one report. They were too close for a miss. Steil lowered his gun, looked foolishly at Curt, who was lying almost across his feet, and then sat down heavily. Larrimer was flat on the ground, clutching at his smashed shoulder, cursing weakly while Steil sat in silent contemplation of the dead man across his feet.

The sheriff stepped over and put his hand on Steil's shoulder, but Steil did not respond. His head merely sagged a trifle lower.

"Good ——!" muttered Sudden. "He must 'a' been dead before he hit the ground. Did he hit yuh, Hartley?"

"No-o-o," said Hashknife softly. "He killed Curt. He was fallin' right in front of Steil's gun. Don't let Larrimer get hold of that gun with his left hand. He's ambidexterous."

Sudden stepped over and picked up the gun, toward which Larrimer was working. A group of horsemen were riding down into the ranch, and Hashknife recognized Sleepy and Bill Steen in the lead.

There were thirteen men in the crowd—but one of them was roped to his saddle. The sheepmen had come through without a casualty. They dismounted and came over to the group. Steen ignored the questions and went to King.

"Eph, are yuh badly hurt?" he asked anxiously.

"I don't know, Bill. I got hit twice and I feel kinda weak. Everythin' is all right now. Hartley put the deadwood on' em. The sheriff thought I was one of the rustlers, and they shot me up quite a little but that's all right."

"I'm danged sorry," said Sudden. "I didn't know, yuh see."

Hashknife turned to Jack.

"The men will help yuh search the ranch, Jack. Yore wife must be around here somewhere."

"She's in the loft of the barn," said Larrimer weakly. "It's no use makin' any more trouble. We didn't harm her any."

"We got Jack Noonan, Hashknife," said Sleepy, pointing at the man on the horse, who was trussed up tightly with ropes. "He was the only one worth bringin' back. Yuh see, the rest of 'em stuck to the ship. Dang yuh, why did yuh run away from me?"

Sleepy looked at the bodies of Curt and Steil and at Ed Larrimer, who was sitting up, holding to his right shoulder.

"Well, I'll be danged if it ain't Ed Larrimer, the Texas Daisy!"

"Oh, go to ——!" groaned Larrimer. "I should have turned the gang loose to kill you two and let the cows go to ——"

"You came danged near gettin' us the first night we showed up here," laughed Hashknife.

"I know it. If we'd have known that it was you two, you'd never got out of Jack Hartwell's place alive, I'll tell yuh that, Hartley."

"Here comes Jack and his wife!" exclaimed Sleepy.

THEY were coming from the stable. Molly's clothes were badly torn, and her face bore evidence that she had not enjoyed her enforced stay in the hay loft, but she was unhurt, laughing just a trifle hysterically. Every one was trying to shake hands with her, but she ran to her father and dropped down beside him.

"I'm all right," he told her. "Kinda leaky, but still on the job, Molly. Don'tcha worry. Everythin' will be all right now."

Molly hugged him and turned to the crowd.

"Jack says that everything is all right again. Oh, I hope it is all right, because everything has been all wrong for so long."

She lifted her eyes and looked up at Marsh Hartwell, as if it was all meant for him. For several moments he looked down at her, as if wondering what to do. Then he walked over, reached down and held out his hand to Eph King.

"Eph," he said, "I don't understand it—all. But, by ——, I understand enough to offer yuh my hand—and my friendship. Will yuh take it? I ain't goin' to blame yuh, if yuh don't. I'm all through blamin' folks for doin' things."

King grinned weakly and held up his hand.

"I reckon we might as well be friends, Marsh. I've packed a lot of hate in my heart, too, but all the bad blood in me has leaked out today. I—I hope——" He turned and looked at Bill Steen. "Say, Bill, take the boys back to camp and begin' runnin' the sheep over Kiopo Pass. They don't want 'em over here—and I don't blame 'em."

He turned to Marsh Hartwell and they shook hands gravely.

"Been a long time, Marsh. I been kinda lonesome to hear a cow bawlin'."

"Come over any time, Eph," said Marsh shakily.

"Yore cows are all safe," said Sleepy. "Noonan says that they are all bunched about fifteen miles from here, out along the railroad. They were goin' to start movin' 'em into Sunland in the mornin', 'cause Larrimer swore that he couldn't hold Eph King any longer."

Jack had gone to Molly and put one arm around her shoulder, turning her to face the crowd.

"Boys," he said, "we thought that the comin' of the sheep was the worst calamity that could happen to Lo Lo Valley, but I reckon it's the best thing that ever happened to Molly and me—outside of the comin' of Hashknife Hartley and his pardner."

"Shucks!" said Hashknife softly. "It was fate, Jack, just fate."

"Fate might have brought yuh here, but it was plain —— nerve that kept yuh here," declared Sudden. "I apologize, Hartley. If yuh want me to, I'll git down on my knees and ask yore pardon."

"——!" snorted Sunshine." "Yuh ought to do that anyway. I knowed all the time that ——"

"This is no time to lie, Sunshine," said the sheriff. "They fooled you as much as they did me. At least be honest at a time like this."

Hashknife grinned widely and looked at Molly.

"Mrs. Hartwell, I'm sure glad for yore sake. The night me and Sleepy found yuh ——"

"And I thought Sleepy was a ghost," laughed Jack. "He had on Molly's nightgown!"

"Oh, I forgot," said Mrs. Hartwell, anxiously. "That night——"

She searched inside her waist and drew out a sheet of paper, which she handed to Jack.

"That is the letter that McLeod brought me, Jack. You were so angry when you came back, and tore the letter—oh, I—I—it hurt me to think that you suspected me ——"

"Good gosh!" exploded Jack. "Oh, I must 'a' been a fool. This letter—" he held it out toward the crowd—"was from her father. I was fool enough to think my own wife was a spy for the sheepmen. I tore a corner off, in tryin' to take the letter from her. And on the part I got, was, 'Find out what—'. Just those three words. And I thought Eph King was askin' for information about the cattlemen. Here is what the letter says—includin' what I tore off:

> "Dear Molly: Just a short note to let you know that I have found out how things are for you and Jack down there. Why didn't you write and tell your old dad about it? De Larimore told me how they had treated you, and it makes me mad enough to come down and whip the whole valley. See if you can find out what Jack wants to do. I have

plenty of work for a man like Jack. If he don't want to work with sheep, I can turn the Turkey Track ranch over to him. He knows enough about cattle to make that ranch pay ——"

"Turkey Track?" interrupted Marsh Hartwell wonderingly.

"I've owned it for two years, Marsh," said King softly. "Yuh see, I couldn't keep out of the cattle business. The man you call Larrimer was recommended to me by Jack Noonan, about the time I bought the Turkey Track, so I made it appear that Larrimer was the owner.

"Larrimer framed up this thing and kept me posted. He and his men were the ones that shot the old man at Kiopo Pass. He told me that he had it fixed for us to drive straight into the valley, but later on he said his plans had gone wrong. Then he said that there were some men who suspected him and that it would be impossible to break through his side of the line.

"He told us that the dead-line was mined with dynamite, and that a sparrow couldn't cross it. We had no way of finding out just how strong the line was. He wanted us to wait, so we waited—until Hartley came across and told us the truth. Now I'm goin' to give Jack and Molly the Turkey Track for a weddin' present. And I wish you'd see about gettin' me to a doctor, cause I don't want to die off, when there's so much hatchet-buryin' goin' on, Marsh."

"Just as soon as we can get yuh to one, Eph," said Marsh. "We'll take yuh to the Arrow, while one of the boys rides after the doctor."

"What about me?" Thus Abe Allison.

No one had paid any attention to him. He had taken no part in the shooting, made no effort to run away. Now the crowd considered him, rather amazed to think that he had been overlooked.

"Oh, yeah," Hashknife looked at him critically. "You were one of Ed Larrimer's men, wasn't yuh, Allison?"

"Uh-huh," Allison looked around at the crowd. "I'm as guilty as ——, I reckon. To me, this wasn't a killin' proposition. But I'm not beggin'. I knew it was crooked work; so I'll take my medicine."

"He never killed anybody," said Larrimer, whose wound was being bound up by one of the sheepmen. "Abe was straight until he worked for me."

"I'll take care of him," said the sheriff firmly. "Get me a lariat, Sunshine. We'll make a clean sweep of the whole gang while we're at it."

"Who will make a clean sweep?" asked Hashknife.

Sunshine stopped and looked back at the sheriff.

"You better answer that, Sudden," he grinned.

"Well, all right," grudgingly. "I'll admit that Hartley made a clean sweep. I'll help a little by puttin' Allison where he belongs."

"Let's talk about it a little," said Hashknife. "It appears to me that we all forgot Allison, until he chirps up and asks us what to do with him. My idea of the right thing to do would be to ask Mr. Allison to grab his hat, rattle his hocks out of this country and promise to never come back."

"You mean—to turn him loose?" asked the sheriff, a trifle amazed. "Why, he's a rustler ——"

"Was, yuh mean," Hashknife grinned softly. "I reckon he's what you'd call a complete cure, Sudden."

The sheriff scratched his head; his eyes squinted thoughtfully.

"You ought to be satisfied, Sudden," observed Sunshine. "You've got enough now to brag about for the rest of yore life."

Some one laughed. Sudden hunched his shoulders and glared at Sunshine, but turned to Allison, half choking with anger.

"You here yet? Whatsa matter—ain't yuh got no horse? Want us to haul yuh away? My ——, some folks can't take a hint!"

He whirled on his heel and barked an order at Sunshine.

"Get some of these reformed sheepherders to help yuh rig up a litter of some kind. We've got to pack Eph King to the Arrow. And some of yuh fix up Larrimer, so he can ride a horse. Can'tcha move? My gosh, I don't want to do everythin'."

The crowd hastened to construct the litter. Allison had not moved, and now he turned to Hashknife, his face twitching nervously.

"Did he mean that I could go away—free, Hartley?"

"Are you here yet?" grinned Hashknife.

Allison took a deep breath and started toward the corral, but after a few strides he stopped and looked at Hashknife.

“Kinda queer, ain’t it?” he whispered foolishly. “I—I want to run, but I’m scared to do it.”

“You don’t have to run,” said Hashknife.

“I know it.” He smiled queerly. “I don’t have to—but I can’t hardly help myself.” He brushed the back of his hand across his cheek. “I want to say somethin’ to you—but I can’t, it seems like. I—you know, don’tcha, Hartley?”

“Yeah, I know, Allison.”

The freed rustler nodded, turned and walked slowly to the corral, as if trying desperately to hold himself in check. Hashknife smiled thoughtfully and looked at Molly and Jack. The girl’s eyes were filled with tears, but she was smiling at Hashknife, a smile that repaid him for everything he had done.

“Everything is all right—thank you,” she said softly.

“It always was all right,” nodded Hashknife. “Sometimes it takes us quite a while to find it out—but it’s worth more then.”

Marsh Hartwell came to Hashknife. There were tears in the big man’s eyes, and his hand trembled slightly as he held it out to the tall cowboy and said hoarsely:

“Hartley, I just want to say that Marsh Hartwell and Lo Lo Valley owes you a mighty big debt. We’re goin’ to pull off a big meetin’ at the Arrow, just as soon as we can notify those on the dead-line, and if there’s anythin’ in Lo Lo Valley that you and your pardner want, you sure can have it.”

Hashknife shooks hands gravely with him and turned to Sleepy.

“Cowboy, this is our chance. Is there anythin’ yuh want real bad?”

“Yeah, there is.’” Sleepy scratched his ear. “I want a chance to sleep. This is the dangest hoot-owl country I ever got into. And I’ve got to have a package of tobacco. Thassall, I reckon. Now what do you want, Hashknife?”

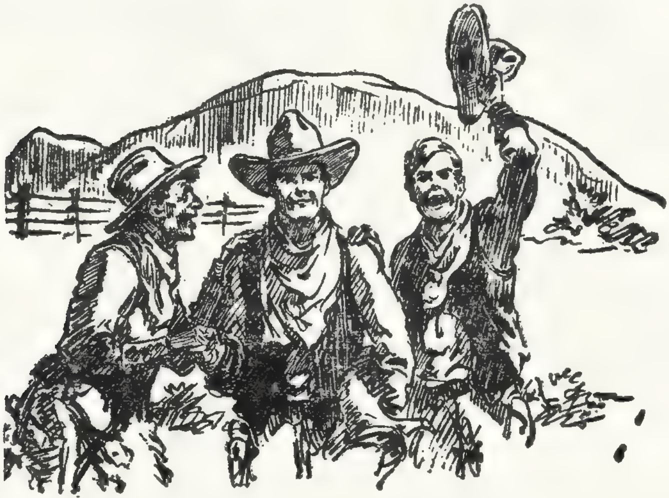
“Me?” Hashknife smiled widely. “Well, I’d kinda like to see the expression on Mrs. Marsh Hartwell’s face when she sees her two kids comin’ home with their dads, and finds out that everythin’ is all right. That’ll be all I want.”

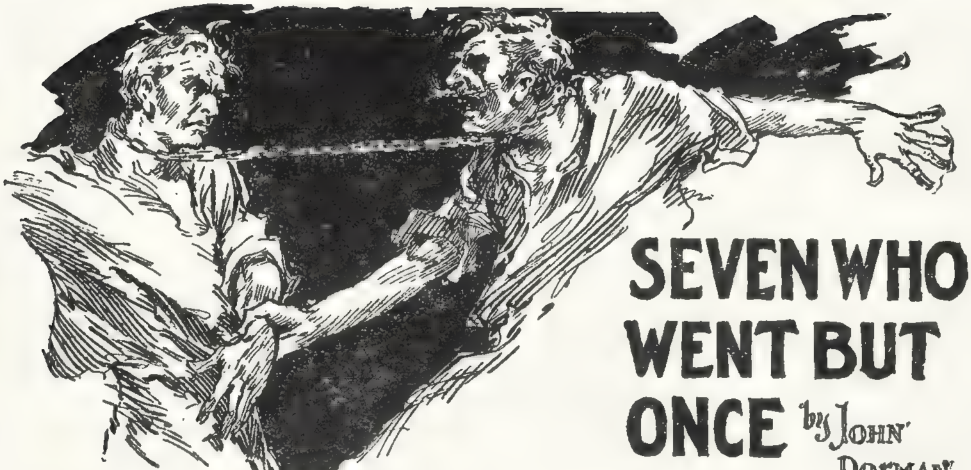
Hashknife turned away and looked out beyond the corral, where Abe Allison was riding up the slope of a hill. He drew rein and waved his sombrero in a sweeping arc. Hashknife threw up his right hand in a peace sign. Sudden Smithy, who was superintending the moving of the wounded, looked up and waved at Allison as if it was the departure of an old friend.

THE menace of Kiopo Pass was gone forever; all dead-lines wiped out. Sunshine Gallagher straightened up and took a deep breath.

“I knowed it would work out like this,” he said wisely.

“Some day,” said Sudden severely, “you’ll git caught lyin’.”





SEVEN WHO WENT BUT ONCE

by John Dorman

Author of "The House of the Broken Poniard" and "Nuné of the Infanta Cay."

PEACE, fool! Would the señor have—? To me, Juan, Pedro! Take him; he has drunk *tequila* beyond all reason or—or he has smoked *mariajuana*. *Por Dios*, but he has. the strength of ten! There—now out with him to my *sala*. Much I owe the señor——

Ha, the señor wakes! And he remembers nothing except that his head pounds like an air drill? Who summons the Evil One, *caballero*, must breathe the fumes of ——. Did the señor seek a thrill, diversion? My soul to God, he is not a boy that he thinks adventures come for the seeking?

So! It is true then, as the women gossip in the marketplace, that Señor Americano makes game for a heavy-eyed señorita whose years are not twice her fingers' number! He wears her flowers and wails beneath her window—that she may dream dreams and relive conquests when she is the fat wife of some scatterbeard horse-dealer.

Dios! But of a truth it is the way of women! So she talked of loving men who had braved many perils, wherefore the señor smoked this cigaret of *mariajuana* and thought to bring honor unto himself by breaking up with a chair the house of his very good friend Don Ramon del Valle—yes, even the House of the Broken Poniard where weapons are not drawn in anger. Such honor, *caballero*, might a man gain by blowing smoke in his father's beard! By the ——, there is infamy in all drugs and all women!

But I, too, have been young and many times in love. Did I not once for near two weeks search all New Orleans for "El Sangrito" at the bidding of one Rosa Gomez, that I might take from him the rose on his coat lapel? Aye, and in the end I won the right to love this Rosa, but I did not keep her, for blood-marked gold and blood-marked women will cling to no man.

Those were hard days in New Orleans, señor, days when a man knew not his best friends and when pistols flashed and knives crimsoned nightly the city over. And in all the town there was none more infamous than El Sangrito, a killer whose pistol and dirk were ever at sale to any bidder. He was the ill-born son of a Portuguese rover and a dancing girl of Buenos Aires, or so many said.

"Bad as El Sangrito!" whispered timid ones when a man or a beast was cold blooded and cruel.

Also they whispered that before each killing he smoked many cigarets of *mariajuana,* which the *Yanquis* call hashish. The señor forgives me for the cuts and bruises my men put upon him? Good! I am for many years past the age when it pleases me to bear malice or to have malice borne me.

Nearly two weeks we looked—with me was my partner Jean Stewart, a *Yanqui* no man need be ashamed to call friend. From waterfront dive to Ramon's of the gin fizzes we went; from great hotel to corner saloon. For El Sangrito was a man without friends, and none knew where he could be found. Like a dog gone mad he hunted alone, but the señor will believe that his hunting was successful.

Men whom he sought disappeared and there was none to say where they had gone, so daily he walked the streets. Without doubt his victims went into the river, for it is well known that the great Mississippi does not give up its dead.

At last we gave up and looked no more, but only waited. In the end, sir, a man learns that he finds best all things by waiting. So we found El Sangrito by waiting in the Old Absinthe House on Bourbon Street. Perhaps the señor has heard of it, a very old place where for many years the best of New Orleans gossiped over the wine cups, and where for many other years the best of my kind—which the French call the *demi-monde* *—drank and played at many games.

So came El Sangrito on the third evening of our waiting. He was clad in perfect evening dress, with a broad red sash about his waist and a cloak thrown over his shoulder. On the lapel of his jacket was one great red rose, dark and rich as the little musk roses of the north. He was a veritable dandy, sir; his nails were polished and his hair was curled. A man of no great size, neither large nor small, but withal he had the carriage which would make few feel safe in treading on him. Could he have lived and reformed, sir, he would have made a very brave soldier.

There sat Stewart and I in an upstairs room above the bar, spinning gold eagles between us while other men looked on. Of a truth, it is a pretty game, señor, with the gold flashing in the lamp light. It can only be played by three when one wishes more than diversion, the coins spinning out on the table and the odd man winning. When we wished it, it was always Jean or I who won, for we had eagles prepared for the purpose. Yes, out of four very good gold pieces a smith had made us four which were full weight but full of deceit. Two of the four had heads on each side and the other pair had all tails. So it was easy to shoot out the coins, letting them whirl many times, and still win—we had but to chose those of opposite natures and one of us must surely win!

Very often we had much sport with wise fools by these means when we could not in any way induce them to play cards. It looked very honest, for it did not seem possible that we could control the coins. Ha, a man who trusts a gambler is a very great fool indeed, for all are dishonest, *caballero*—all but myself, and I——

There stood El Sangrito at the head of the stairway, while all around was silence after that first instant when many lips had breathed his name. Glasses were poised, sentences broken in half, in that great stillness, for none knew but that it might be himself whom the killer marked and followed.

Then he bowed very low and advanced a few steps into the room. He was as an animal, walking with the light grace of a cat and the sure step of a mountain goat, and he was filled with that queer thing which makes men gaze in fascination at a rattler or a Gila monster.

As I looked he caressed the rose I had sworn to take, had promised Rosa Gomez I would bring to her. I had met her on the packet *Tulane*, and seldom have my eyes followed a woman as they did that bit of a girl when with her *duenna* she came aboard at St. Louis; never a flower could have matched her beauty and her great vitality as did the deep red rose she loved so well.

It was a poor trip with but few passengers, who kept their gold in the purser's safe and who could not be lured by even our spinning eagles. Never were the trips downriver as rich as those up-bound; from New Orleans planters brought payment for produce, and at New Orleans gathered men of all the world seeking entrance to the vast lands in the heart of your country. Very often these adventurers went upstream full of swagger and good gold, only to return with but one shirt and no boasting of the places they had been. It is many days shorter downstream than up, too, and that does not help the gambler.

The señor will believe that I was willing enough to make love to the bewitching Rosa while her *duenna* nodded in her chair. Yes, and even at the port of their stateroom while the old dame snored lustily! *Caramba*, what greater proof of my devotion could be had than that those snores only heated my ardor!

"Ah, *caballero mio*," she whispered through that port one night, and her sweet breath fanned my cheek as she spoke, "heroes I love, and any man I love must be a hero! You—you sell sugar from Habana! No, my Ramon, never could I love a sugar salesman unless he was also a brave, brave man!"

---

* Not used in the American sense.

So in many great words I swore that in Cuba I was known as a man of valor, even if I did sell sugar from my father's plantation to *Americanos*—may the soul of my sainted father forgive me the lies I have spoken around his name! And like the very young fool I was I asked her to set me a task that I might prove the depth of my love for her.

As we walked down the gang plank at the foot of Canal Street she whispered to me—

"My Ramon, if you bring me the rose of El Sangrito at dusk on St. Joseph's Day, that night shall we marry."

And she slipped into my hand a little card with her name and a street and number.

How was I to know, señor, that she was the rose of El Sangrito, and that she had sent many suitors to pluck from his lapel the flower which she herself had placed there? I—I went to seek El Sangrito!

BUT now that I had found him I scarce knew how to gain the rose. I could not simply rise and strike him down, could not provoke a fight without a reason. Hothead that I was, I might not so lightly brawl over a woman's word. But a plan comes, señor, if the act be the will of the saints.

So we spun our eagles and around us men regained their voices. I hoped that the flashing of the gold would draw him to our table and into speech with us. And it did. As I reached out to collect the two coins after a winning I felt a man at my side, and my nostrils caught the trace of a very subtle perfume. It was El Sangrito, and he said:

"A pleasing game, gentlemen. Can it be played by three?"

We arose, bowed very low, and I placed a chair for him. He nodded as I explained the simple rules, drew out a sheaf of notes, and ordered a waiter to bring him gold for them. We began, and the señor will believe that in an hour we had him down to his last eagle and the crowd was very thick about our table.

Of all those massed men I do not believe that any noticed that a lower button of Stewart's shirt was undone, that his right hand hung with the finger-tips just within the garment, nor that my own hand was held over my girdle and dagger. A pistol is better concealed in the waistband than any where, and it may be as easily withdrawn. I—pistols are not for me! At times I have carried a derringer up each sleeve, but I never cared to.

Out shot Jean's eagle, out shot mine, each holding them by the middle finger of the left hand and snapping them with the first. Our signals had called for my partner to use a coin which was both sides heads and me that which was both sides tails. I won.

"The señor wears a beautiful rose," I said to El Sangrito. "I will trade him a gold eagle for it if he wishes."

He laughed, and I did not like that laughter. It reeked of knives flashing in dark alleys and blows of leaded clubs! And he said:

"So! Another has fallen a victim to the charms of my Rosa Gomez! Señor Soft Heart, seven before you have come for the rose of El Sangrito—and each man has come but once!"

Those last words he only breathed, señor. He looked directly into my eyes, his lips were but inches from my own, yet I felt his words rather than heard them—and he laughed again.

Then—it was very foolish, señor, and had El Sangrito been better liked it would have been suicide. But that laughter was as the spurting and gurgling of blood from a severed vessel; afraid I was of El Sangrito, but of the hideous things his laughter bespoke I was more afraid, and so I said—

"You will not trade for even this coin?"

Before his eyes I picked up one of our false pieces and showed him the deceit by which he had been beaten. Waiting under the moldering torture of those eyes was too much; I had to force an issue.

My soul to the Savior! I have not known a man to move as quickly as did El Sangrito! His venomous eyes darted at the coin and in the barest glance he saw the truth, and his dirk flashed from nowhere to bury itself in my arm.

I can remember a glimpse of the steel as it left his clothing, and then it was stuck in my left arm as I raised it to guard my throat, passing between the bones and protruding on the other side. See, there are the two marks.

His hand left the hilt of the weapon as I forced myself to my feet. He grasped at it quickly, but before he could touch it again

Jean Stewart was in command. His pistol fitted his hand as a glove might fit, for I have known him to spend hours in practising his draw. *Dios!* He was a man!

Back went the crowd to the far edges of the room; back went El Sangrito with them, but his dirk remained in my arm.

"So El Sangrito for once strikes in the light!" whispered my companion, but the señor will believe that all could hear his whisper. "El Sangrito should be more careful. He belongs in the alleys and the dark. He is very brave—when he strikes from behind against unarmed men!"

And while his pistol still menaced the crowd about us he came to my side and with his left hand plucked the dirk from my forearm, for it is not a thing a man does easily for himself. At his order a waiter brought a roll of bandage and wrapped it tightly about the wound. I think, *caballero*, that they often had need of dressings for wounds in that place!

"Can you stand up against him with a knife?" Stewart asked of me, and I only nodded, for as yet the pain of the wound in my arm was great.

Of a truth, señor, I did not believe I could. But a man will venture much rather than admit himself a coward; a man in love will forget alike both fear and caution. Perhaps if I had realized what Jean Stewart was about to do I might not have nodded so lightly.

IT IS not uncommon, señor, for a man to draw his knife, take one end of a kerchief in his teeth and invite an enemy to do the same at the other end. But a man can very quickly, even at the price of reputation, drop that kerchief; a chain well tied about his neck he can not drop.

Yes, by the Virgin, that was what Stewart did! He bade a waiter get him a thin chain by which a lamp was hung to the ceiling, a chain no longer than a man's outstretched hands are far apart.

It must be a battle to the death, *caballero* Around my throat the waiter tied one end of the chain; around the neck of El Sangrito the other. And my enemy seemed no more pleased with the arrangement than did I; he was but a sorry picture of the famous killer as he drew off his jacket and took a cigaret from his case. A waiter lighted a match for him and he drew great gasping drafts of smoke into his lungs. It was a hashish cigaret that he smoked, *caballero*, and one made many times more powerful by being wet and rolled in sugar. *Dios*, but the many men I have known to kill and maim after smoking a *mariajuana* cigaret and drinking a glass of *mescal!* Yes, and many a man I have known to tighten a *rieta* over a limb for a killing thus made.

Then the chain was fastened and we crouched at either end of it, pulling it taut between us. And when El Sangrito tossed away his cigaret he was no longer man at all. No! I was bound to a leering *lobo*, driven beyond all fear by the enemies around him and the spell of the drug in his brain.

Corpo de Dios! I felt the flesh on my back crawl upward! I shrank back until the chain bit my neck at the rear, back, back—the señor will believe it was not a pleasant situation. But El Sangrito only laughed, a soundless, soulless laughter.

I saw a waiter approach him with his dirk; I felt one put my dagger in my hand. Then he was upon me. Knife ground on knife as I warded off his thrust, and I too went a little mad with the relief from waiting, so that for a minute I knew nothing but the joy of battle.

His left hand clasped my throat, his right presented the point of his weapon ever at my breast. With my weakened left hand I managed to clasp his elbow; with my right I threw his hand from me and in the same sweeping movement sought to bury my dagger in his red sash. But his blade met mine.

Thrust and counterthrust; it was an age of joyful battle before my dagger caught in the guard of his dirk and with a great lunge I disarmed him. Yes, threw his dirk far over the heads of the onlookers.

I laughed, señor a panting laugh, and I forgot all honor in the effort to end the battle. I lunged and thrust at him, marking his arms, his cheek, his forehead; tearing his shirt to shreds which were soaked with blood. But his wounds were only scratches; time and again he writhed from before my weapon's point as I thought I had found a fatal opening.

And before me El Sangrito went mad, the last link that bound the beast to the man snapped and there was not even a trace of human being left. For so it is with the devotees of *mariajuana*. In exchange for a year or two of drug-fed ferocity they sell their lives or at least their sanity.

Foam flecked his snarling lips, his nostrils distended and quivered, his eyes burned with the unholy brilliance of the damned. Horrible sounds came from his throat, and his teeth gleamed and flashed. Willingly enough I would have severed the chain which bound me to him, for a dagger is naught but a dagger; the thing I faced was a maniac!

Mad was El Sangrito, not with the sullen madness of a dog crazed by disease, but with the insane ferocity of a wolf fighting a sharp-toothed trap.

Like a great bull ape he crouched and sprang. My knife struck some metal in his belt, or perhaps his watch, and then I was lifted high in the air at the end of his trembling arms. Long he held me thus, and he turned my body in his hands so that my face was upward and I slashed blindly down without touching him at all.

At last he cast me from him as a boy might cast a rock. If the señor will seek out the place of which I speak he will find a great stairway guarded by a heavy banister. Such was the mad strength of El Sangrito that he threw me with force enough to drag his body from his feet as if he had leaped—or so said Stewart afterward.

There was a grinding jerk at the back of my neck and for many minutes I was unconscious. But he had thrown me so that I lay on the floor against the railing and he himself went tumbling down the stairs until the chain stopped him. Jean was at my side in but a moment. It could not have been longer, or I too would have hanged. With his one hand he grasped the chain to relieve my neck of the weight of El Sangrito's struggling body, whereon blood colored him in blotches and perfume was sweetly fragrant.

With his left hand alone, on which there were marks of the chain for many days, Jean Stewart held up the kicking body of my enemy until it ceased to jerk and became a dead weight on the thin brass chain, for so far had he thrown me and so far had he been jerked that his feet dangled above the tread of the stairs by inches.

Men unbound the chain from my throat and laid me on a table. But there was none to help El Sangrito. The coyotes will slink in the footsteps of the wolf to lick the bones of his kills, but when the wolf is trapped the coyotes only wait for him to die.

Thus, by the grace of the saints, died El Sangrito, strangled by a slipping knot in the end of the chain which Stewart held. When I regained my senses he lay on a table near me, his face flushed with impure blood, his wounds still bleeding, and with the trace of an erotic perfume still rising from him.

Also the room was full of police and a waiter was saying:

"El Sangrito set upon him and wounded him before he could draw. Then there was much cutting and slashing, and the killer went mad and choked to death."

A doctor testified that he could not have died of the half-dozen scratches I had given him, and no one seemed to see the purple mark of the chain about his throat. Besides, who is there to lament when a killer dies as he has lived?

SO I went free and on St. Joseph's Day I dressed very carefully and at dusk sought out the street and number which Rosa Gomez had given me. I carried with me, of course, a very wilted rose. And, *caballero*, in the center of it was a tiny cross of pearl, a cross no bigger than the finger-nail of a babe. This was the mark by which Rosita might know her own.

It was a house of crumbling brick, set close upon the street and tightly bound by other buildings. Twice I strolled by it very slowly, and on the third time a gate opened at the side and the old *duenna* came out to beckon me in. I did not like it so very well; I had looked for an elopement, señor, not a formal welcoming.

In the *sala* were set the three images with which those of the Church of Rome may return thanks on St. Joseph's Day if there has been much in the year to cause rejoicing. The little saint is one, the baby Savior another, and the third is—I have forgotten, it has been so many years since last I saw it. My religion, like the washing of my garments, I leave to those who make a business of it! But the day is one set in the middle of the long fasting of Lent for merrymaking and feasting. Also, marriages may be held with the full sanction of the priests. Above and around these images burned many candles; before them lay heaped fruits and other offerings.

Then came Rosa and a fat little man with a big greasy nose. Beautiful! *Par Dios*, sir, I counted as but a trifle the effort I had made to win the love of Rosa Gomez! What, indeed, were a bruise or two and a prick on the arm to give for so radiantly glorious a woman?

"Ramon, Ramon!" she cried. "A hero of heroes, Ramon! Name your reward, my brave one. But name it, and——"

I bowed very low and said—

"Does the señorita forget that my reward was to be——"

Her hands fluttered at me in frantic alarm.

"No, no! Señorita Gomez I am no longer! Since this day noon have I been Señora Schwartz. I think Señor del Valle misunderstood the *we* when I spoke of marriage. Come, *caballero*, the reward!"

Then spoke the little Jew. For such he was, señor, a renegade who had renounced race, family, and faith to wed this lovely Rosa. Schwartz—the name reminds me of naught but a sufferer from the white plague clearing his throat! And he said:

"For the killing of El Sangrito we are willing to pay you much money, Señor del Valle, even to the extent of a thousand dollars. These many months he has harried us with his affections and his threats——"

Señor, of a truth it took an effort to keep from setting my foot in his fat belly—there are men like that. But I ignored him and spoke to Rosa—

"Señor Schwartz, I presume, is a very brave man who has dared much to win the hand of Señorita Gomez?"

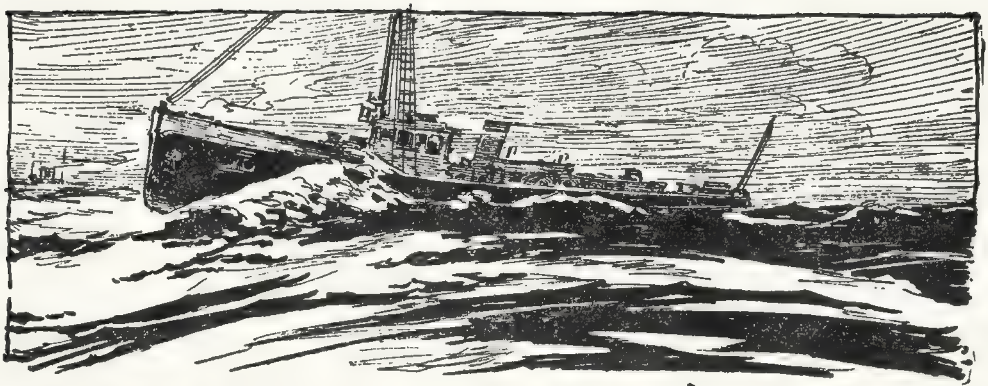
She drew herself up very boldly.

"Sir, Señor Schwartz is a very great merchant tailor. He does not engage in brawling with soulless murderers in dens of infamy! Ah, but my hero Ramon, seven men there were who promised me to take from El Sangrito the rose which he made me give. Seven men whom since I have not seen! But you, you are a very brave man!

"These many months ago we would have wed, Señor Schwartz and I, but always came El Sangrito to say that he would very soon make me a widow did we try it. Ah, dear Virgin Maria, had you not come what would we have done? The police could do no good, for one of the seven was a captain of the police. Another was——"

But I could no longer stop to hear. Señor, there is hate unspeakable; despising beyond all that words might say. Women and drugs! My soul to God, could I not have crushed them in my two hands, greasy renegade and heartless girl alike?

Seven men worth each seven times the value of her moneyladen husband sent to sleep in the mud banks of the lower Mississippi! Seven men who at her bidding went to pluck the rose from the lapel of El Sangrito! Seven who went but once!



SALT ON A BIRD'S TAIL

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE By Charles Victor Fischer

Author of "The Gunner's Big Cruise," "Whose Command?," etc.

EARLY one evening, after chow, when the big cruiser *Farallone's* eight hundred jolly tars were at their jolliest, when the band was jazzing its jazziest on the quarter-deck and her topside and forecastle were a-wiggle with wiggling tars, a tiny, slim, black craft, whose name was *Wild Oats* and who belonged to one Gunner Blackhurst, commanding officer of the naval radio station on Fog Rock, glided across Felgo Bay, swerved in a wide circle astern and came up alongside.

She was long and slim, this *Wild Oats*, being sixty feet over all and nine feet of beam. She was high and sharp forward, flaring in the bows, and low and bulging aft. Her sloping flush deck was divided fore and aft in four sections—forward, twelve feet of high foc'sle; then eighteen feet of cabin; aft of that, twenty feet of engine room; and in her after end a ten-foot cockpit.

Her engine room was sunk deep in her hull and decked over; and on top of this, on the engine room hatch, was cradled a ten-foot skiff, her life boat. A collapsible canopy folded over the cockpit aft. Stepped in the deck at the after edge of the cabin was a forty-foot mast; from the truck of this down to the bowsprit hung a five-wire antenna.

At her wheel was "Blackie," her owner. There were three of his Fog Rock radio gang with him. Leaning out of the cabin windows, one on each side of him were "Graveyard" Wilton, a chief electrician, and "Rusty" Hannigan, an electrician first-class. Back in the engine room was "Wildflower" Pearson, a machinist's mate, first-class, who was self-appointed and undisputed chief engineer of the *Wild Oats*.

They were just visiting. Blackie, the gunner, had once been a gob on the *Farallone's* foolish decks. The big idea was to shake hands with the good old pals of the good old days. Also he wanted to show off his *Wild Oats* to his former shipmates, crow over her, tell them how he had come to own her, and all that.

Which was natural, for she was something to crow over. No poor man's craft was the *Wild Oats*. An admiral wouldn't have turned up his proud nose after a look within that nine by eighteen cabin. In there were deep chairs, folding bunks, a mahogany table and mahogany shelves packed with things nautical. On the pea green enameled bulkheads hung pictures of bygone naval heroes and of bygone ships whose triumphs fill pages of our history. The linoleum deck shone like a mirror. The radio apparatus back in the after port corner was of up-to-the-minute design. There were push buttons, voice tubes, electric lights. Everything in her and on her and about her suggested a heavy bankroll. And verily she could step. Back there in her engine room was gasoline driving-power to the tune of eighteen knots.

"Salt on a Bird's Tail," copyright, 1924, by Charles Victor Fischer.

The ownership of this mote of magnificence Blackie owed to a smile from the Goddess of Chance. A few months before, he had staked his all, a very few thousand dollars, along with his next year's pay checks, against the *Wild Oats*, in a wager with the son of a Felgo millionaire. He won her on one hand of showdown—three queens against three tens. Which in itself, from a gob's point of view, was something to crow over.

But it was not only to shake hands and crow that Blackie went aboard the *Farallone* that evening. He was gunning for a chat with "Daddy" Doone, commanding officer of the *Farallone*. Daddy Doone had just been promoted to the rank of rear-admiral, and, so rumor had it, was soon to be detached to the command of a division of battleships in the Atlantic Fleet. And there was the bug in Blackie's head; he wanted to sound out old boy Doone, "throw out a feeler" for a job on that division flagship—staff duty.

But Blackie didn't have that little chat. He failed to connect with Daddy Doone. The gang in the big cruiser's radio office buttonholed him. They wanted to know all about that radio compass out on Fog Rock—a new wireless knockout; an apparatus that gives the exact bearing or direction of a sending ship from the station receiving. Which was much, and took Blackie a long time to tell them, for it involved much of technical exposition and drawing of diagrams.

They talked and talked and the evening slipped away. They wanted to know, these Farry tars. And many were the questions they fired at the gunner.

"But what I don't get through my block is this," spoke up one "Slats" Withers: "You swing your compass on a ship sendin'. Awright. You get 'er bearin'; she's in a certain direction from Fog Rock, say southwest. Awright. Your compass tells you she's southwest of Fog Rock. But how do you know how far off she is?"

"We don't," Blackie answered.

"But you said some ships are usin' it in navigation."

"Well, it's like this," Blackie replied: "Suppose a ship is a couple or three hundred miles off the coast. She's in a fog, say. Her skipper wants to know right quick where he is. He can't take a sight—he's got no sun, no stars. All right. She calls Fog Rock and asks for her bearing.

"We swing our compass on her. Then we shoot her bearing from us. Her skipper rules that off on his chart. Then he gets his bearing from *another* station, up or down the coast. He rules that off. Then, where those two bearings cross on his chart, that's where he is—right to a dot."

And so on, till "taps" on the bugle told Blackie he had lost out on his chat with the new rear-admiral. Taps meant—

"Gobs, turn in. Visitors, go home."

Which accounts for the gunner being unusually silent, as the *Wild Oats* crossed Felgo Bay that evening and pointed out into the dark Pacific for Fog Rock, which lay forty miles west.

THE *Wild Oats* didn't go straight home that evening.

A few miles west of Felgo Bay, Blackie and his three tars picked up a crippled catboat containing two Greek fishermen. These had been adrift for several hours with a broken down engine. This in itself didn't amount to much; it merely meant getting home late. But it led to a lot of fun for Blackie and his tars. They towed the driftaways to their home village, a cluster of fishermen's shacks twenty miles up the coast. And then the fun began.

Heading west-southwest for Fog Rock, about five miles off the coast they sighted two big barges, each being towed by a motor launch. These were all strung out in a row, moving in a northwesterly direction. The *Wild Oats* passed close astern of them. That she didn't plunge headlong into them was providential—for neither towing launches nor barges showed any lights; and it was a dark, starless night. It was Rusty Hannigan who sighted them.

"Well if that ain't a —— of a crust!" he snapped suddenly, leaning forward out of the cabin window. "Look at 'em! No lights!"

Graveyard let out a growl, picked up the megaphone and danced out through the after door.

"Don't!" Blackie checked him. "Keep mum."

The gunner then altered the course of the *Wild Oats* a little to the southward. The four dark objects were swallowed up in the blackness astern.

"We'll just run right on past as if we never noticed them," Blackie added.

"What do you think?" queried Graveyard.

"Search me," Blackie answered.

"But it looks phony, Gunner. No lights!"

"Phony is right. Not only that. They're heading about northwest. On that course they've got nothing ahead of them but the Pacific. They're not headed for Siberia. They're going out to meet some ship."

"Booze runners, maybe," from Rusty.

"Booze runners don't go out in big coal barges," Blackie replied.

"Why not get after them," put in Graveyard, "and find out."

"What, like this—lit up like a jewelry store window?"

Graveyard only grunted. Rusty chuckled. The *Wild Oats* went galloping buoyantly over the long swells.

"You think they're goin' out to load up with chinks, eh, gunner?" said Rusty.

"I don't think it, lad," Blackie laughed. "I've merely got that little hunch. Anyhow, we'll keep an eye on them."

After running southward a way Blackie had his tars darken ship. Then he put the *Wild Oats* about and brought her romping back on the trail of the night walkers, with a double lookout, Graveyard and Rusty, on top of her cabin.

Dark though it was they soon picked up the two tows again. Blackie then buzzed his chief engineer, Wildflower, to the voice-tube and told him to stop her and then go ahead slow. The *Wild Oats* fell in on the tail end of the midnight parade. She being slim, and as black as the night itself, it was no trick to follow, keeping back out of sight.

Blackie didn't, however, purpose followlowing them to their destination. Behind his black eyes lurked a different idea. For the present he merely wanted to ascertain the exact course they were steering.

If they were going out to load up with smuggled aliens, he reasoned, they could have no intention of returning tonight. It was near midnight now, and at this low rate of speed—they weren't making more than three knots—they couldn't make the return trip before daylight. They wouldn't bring in two barges laden with smuggled pigtails in the daytime. They would go out and lie alongside of whatever ship was out there for the rest of the night, load up tomorrow and start back late in the afternoon.

So after stalking them for a half-hour Blackie brought the *Wild Oats* around to the westward. Then he leaned out of the window and called Graveyard and Rusty down from on top of the cabin.

"We'll head for Blue Rock," Blackie announced, when the two rejoined him. "We can anchor there in a lee for the night. Then in the morning we can take glasses, get up on the peak of the rock and take a look around."

He turned and buzzed Wildflower to the voice-tube.

"Speed 'er up, Wildy," he said.

"I was just beginnin' to think that's where those birds were headin' for—Blue Rock," said Rusty.

"Not on your life, lad," Blackie replied with positiveness. "They're steering nor'-west by north. Dope it out. Blue Rock is thirty miles north of Fog Rock—nearly dead nor'west of Felgo. Now we towed those two wops twenty miles north of Felgo. Then we headed west sou'west for five miles. Now what direction does that put Blue Rock from us?"

"You couldn't prove it by me, sir," said Rusty.

"Why, a little west o' north," answered Graveyard.

"And that's how we're heading," said Blackie. "Straight for Blue Rock. On the course they're steering those birds 'll pass way to the north of Blue Rock."

The *Wild Oats* settled down to her long, galloping stride and pounded westward. After a while a gusty wind sprang up in the north and the sea became choppy.

"You fellows might as well flop," Blackie said presently. "I can find Blue Rock blindfolded."

Rusty sprawled in one of the big easy chairs and Graveyard on one of the folding bunks. Soon they were grunting and squirming in their sleep. For the wind heightened and the sea grew more and more choppy. The little black ship pitched and rolled, her plunging bow dipping up and hurling back spray after spray.

Leaning out of the open cabin window, with one hand on the wheel a little behind and to the left of him, Blackie steered subconsciously, by the wind on his cheek. Also he watched subconsciously through the hissing spray that showered over him, watched for that great black mass, Blue Rock, to bulge up out of the sea ahead.

He was hardly aware that he was wet and getting wetter. The gunner was solely occupied with his big idea.

Here was the sweetest of sweet opportunities to hurl the sneers back into the sneering teeth of that Felgo newspaper that had, only a few days before, devoted a half page to making fun of the radio compass. Some little wag had had a huge time of it, inventing funny twists and turns of logic and phrase concerning the new wireless knockout. Why, this smart Aleck wanted to know, why hadn't the radio compass checked the illicit influx of aliens? As if a smuggler would open up with her radio transmitting-set in these days—with every radio station on the coast standing by to jump on her, swing the compass and plot her position to a fraction of a dot!

But if you put salt on a bird's tail you can catch the bird. And along the same line of reasoning, Blackie meditated, if the *Wild Oats* could get on that ship's tail, and stay on her tail, the while making radio signals for the two shore stations Fog Rock and Point Hawk to swing their compasses on, how could she get away?

It would take a speedy ship to outrun the *Wild Oats*. Not many steamers engaged in such traffic can do eighteen knots. The *Wild Oats* had only to hang on and make signals, till one of the revenue cutters came out and overhauled them. The two shore stations had only to take the *Wild Oats'* bearings every time she opened up, and broadcast these to the vessel in pursuit, the revenue cutter. And all the captain of the revenue cutter had to do was string off each pair of bearings on his chart, and keep heading for the cross, the point where the two bearings intersected.

The idea looked good to Blackie. It buzzed round in his head, while the wind howled in his ears and the spray showered over him. It made time fly. Long before he expected it Blue Rock hove in sight. And in the same moment that he sighted the big bulge of black ahead, a buzz at his left told him Wildflower wanted to talk. The gunner pressed the button, then put his ear to the tube.

"Say, Gunner," said the man in the engine-room, "I wish you'd send Rusty back to give me a hand securing the canopy over the cockpit. She's shippin' water. I got half the Pacific aboard."

"Uh-huh," Blackie cut in on him. "Well, say, Wildy, never mind about that. We'll anchor soon. I've got Blue Rock in sight."

With that Blackie stepped back to the cabin window. He saw it in clear relief now, a towering black pyramid, a quarter of a mile ahead, a little to starboard. He gave the *Wild Oats* a spoke of the wheel, brought her around till she pointed for it. And thus he held her for a few minutes, till the eastern end of Blue Rock was not more than a hundred yards ahead; then he put over the helm and allowed her to ease off to the south of it.

The *Wild Oats* stopped tossing the moment she swung into the lee of the rock. Blackie buzzed Wildflower to stop the engine. Then, as she glided along on momentum, he left the wheel and went forward on the foc'sle. A few jerks at the stops and the anchor-chain was ready for letting go. After which he stepped back to the cabin window and, thrusting a hand through, grasped the wheel and brought her around till she pointed in. Slowly she crept up on the frowning black mass. When she had almost drifted out her momentum, Blackie buzzed Wildflower for a kick astern. Then he jumped forward and kicked over the anchor.

The rattle and rumble of the anchor chain, and the commotion and vibration due to the backing propeller brought Graveyard out of the folding bunk with a "What the ——!" which was echoed by Rusty, in the big easy chair.

Blackie came in from the foc'sle and gave Wildflower a buzz to stop the backing engine.

"Everything is hunky, fellows," he said. "We're in the lee of Blue Rock. Go to sleep again."

EARLY that morning, while his three tars buzzed and snored away the dawning moments, Blackie arose, put on his wet clothes, slung a pair of binoculars round his neck, then tiptoed out of the cabin and aft along the passageway to where the skiff was cradled on the engine room hatch.

She lay in a harbor on the island's southern shore. A hundred yards off, a wall of black rock rose to the height of three hundred feet and extended in an easterly and westerly crescent. From far overhead came the whine and snarl of the wind. Now and then he heard the faint scream of a gull, or the deep groan of a sea lion. The distant crash and boom of water against rock, and the white-specked seascape that stretched away beyond the two headlands forming the harbor told Blackie that out there things were wild and weathery.

He unlashed the skiff, hooked her to the davit, swung her out, lowered her into the water, jumped into her and shoved off.

He rowed in, searching the rock down along the water's edge for a landing place. This was hard to find. He saw numerous ledges and niches, but nearly all of these were swarmed with sea lions. Scores of these animals, from as small as a puppy to as big as a cow, writhed and squirmed about on the low crags, or plunged and splashed about in the water. They yelped and growled at him, but kept their distance. Finally he found a low ledge that was deserted, and put in to it.

It took him a half hour to climb to the peak, for this towered over five hundred feet above sea level and the going up was rugged and slippery. And despite the robust fibers and muscles and lungs wrapped in the fine six feet of him, he was a fagged and winded Blackie when he got up to that peak.

He sat down on the rock and gazed out upon the wild sea. That gaze rendered him a disappointed Blackie. All he could see was a wallowing waste of tumbling white and gray, swept with driving volumes of vapor and spindrift. No black speck that might be a ship—not even a porpoise, or a gull could he see. He trained his glasses about him in a complete circle, searched every degree of the dark gray horizon. He could pick up nothing. It was too murky. He couldn't see farther than three miles.

The best Blackie could do was grin. The *Wild Oats* couldn't do much in this. She'd be like a toothpick in a whirlpool out there in those mountains and valleys of water. His only hope lay in the overhead, in the dark rain clouds that swirled and raced across the leaden sky. A good heavy rain that would beat down the sea—that was the stuff.

For an hour he sat there leaning against the howling wind, now training the glasses out over the boisterous sea, now watching the breakers crash against the rocks far below along the island's northern shore. They boomed and roared in one on top of the other and broke in great gushy sprays that rose as high as seventy-five feet or more. Now and then he turned and trained his glasses downward on the *Wild Oats*, lying snug and tranquil at her anchorage. As yet there was no sign of life aboard her.

And then what he most wanted came. It rained. Nothing would have made Blackie feel better than those first few drops that fogged up his binoculars. This was the stuff! Let it pour! Let it teem! He cared not a whoop how wet he got, just so the sea got flattened down.

And how it did rain! Three minutes after those first few drops befogged his glasses it was teeming. Rain! In those few minutes Blackie learned that in his thirty years of roustabout existence he had overlooked something. No, sir; he had never seen it rain before! So dense was the downpour that it was all he could do to breathe. With every breath he got a drink. See? He couldn't. It fell in a solid mass. It was a cloudburst.

He must get down; get out from under. There was no standing up under this! It was as if he were standing beneath a gigantic waterfall. It was beating him down, crushing him. He had the feeling of being squashed into the rock on which he stood.

He went stumbling—somewhere. He fell, got up, fell again. Then down, down, down he was rolling and somersaulting, belly over back, head over heels. He stopped rolling and began sliding, feet first. He lost the seat of his trousers, then a portion of his seat proper. And then to wind it up he fell, bolted right over an edge of rock, landing on his haunches on solid rock, after a fall of twenty feet or more.

Another roll or two. Then, oh, what a relief! He could breathe again. He was in out of it—or at least the upper portion of him was. His legs didn't matter. Just where he was was neither here nor there. He had fetched up in some sheltered crag or cranny—and for the present that was all he cared to know.

A clamorous squawking broke on his ears. He sat up, pulling his feet in from under the waterfall. Looking up, he saw that he was in the shelter of a bulge of rock, the under side of which extended obliquely upward. Within arm's reach two white seagulls squawked and fluttered and blinked their protest at him.

Blackie moved over a way, for he was no

hog. And the birds seemed satisfied to go it fifty-fifty with him. They quieted down, huddled close together, paying him no further attention beyond now and then a tolerant glance of their beady eyes.

For two hours Blackie sat crouched beneath that bulge of rock, with nothing to look at but two suspicious birds and a wall of falling water within a yard of his face. He was drenched all over, his teeth rattled, his joints and muscles were stiff and sore and nauseous hunger gnawed at his inners; but he dared not sally forth till things let up. Several times he essayed to make friends with the birds. Nothing doing; they pecked at his outstretched hand and squawked, "Gwan! gwan!"

At last it began to let up. The roar of falling water diminished and the wall before him thinned to transparency. The two gulls took life and commenced to flap and squawk again. He crawled out finally. It took him a full minute to straighten up. Then he was several minutes flexing his muscles and working the kinks out of his joints.

It still rained, but lightly. Above him he saw where he had fallen from—the huge boulder forming the top of the bulge that had sheltered him. He chuckled. Lucky? Nay, it was a miracle that he hadn't gone rolling and bouncing right on down into the sea, for here the rock fell away almost perpendicularly.

The sea to the northward was shut off from view. From where he was he could see only to the south and west. He would have to climb up to the peak again. Not that he hoped to see anything now, for his glasses were soaked and useless, and the sky was still overcast. He would just take a random look and then make back for the *Wild Oats*.

No breakers crashed against the rocks below now. The rain god had spoiled the wind god's whole night of fun; had flattened the sea down smooth. It had stopped raining. There was no wind. The chatter of numerous gulls and the murmur and splash of running and falling water filled the air. The sky was still overcast, but the atmosphere was clear.

He stood up on the peak, a picture of wet and haggard forlornness. He felt like a rat in a rain barrel. A drink of whisky was what he needed—a stiff one, two, or three. Yes, and verily he would have it, or them, as soon as he got back aboard, out of the medicine locker.

Then abruptly Blackie forgot all about that drink. Something else furnished the stimulus his organs were clamoring for, something he saw. It was a tiny speck of black, far out to the northward on the vast sheet of gray. His teeth quit rattling, his strong prominent features tensed and the droop came out of his big shoulders.

It might be a gull, or a porpoise, or a sea lion—but no; it didn't move. And the longer he scrutinized it the more firmly he became convinced that it was not a log of driftwood; he would be unable to see a piece of floating timber at that distance, it was far out on the horizon, eight, possibly ten miles off. It could be nothing but a ship.

"Yes, sir," he muttered; "that's you!" And shaking a big fist at the mote on the horizon he added: "What the radio compass does to you'll be in tomorrow night's papers!"

With that he turned and started downward.

BLACKIE'S three tars had breakfast ready when he returned aboard. Graveyard had just finished sizzling pork chops and spuds on the electric stove in the engine room, and Rusty and Wildflower were spreading the dishes on the cabin table. They had plenty to eat on board, having purchased provisions for the Fog Rock radio mess the day before in Felgo.

"Well, fellows," Blackie began when they were seated, "she's ours. I've got her spotted. She's way up north of us."

They eyed him in silent expectancy.

"All we need do now is keep our eyes open and our mouths closed," Blackie went on. "We'll have to stand watches all day up on the peak, or till those two barges start back for the beach—till we see that black speck split into two black specks. In the meantime we mustn't show ourselves or open up with our radio."

"I don't quite get you, Gunner," spoke up Graveyard. "You can't be figurin' on mixin' things with a whole mob of chinks. We've got no guns——"

"Won't need any."

"Gonna just sort o' convoy 'em in, at a distance, meanwhile radio the commandant in Felgo to shoot out one o' the revenue cutters?"

"No—and yes. Sure, we'll radio the commandant about the two barges. But that'll finish us with them. Picking them up will be up to whatever revenue boat comes out. The people we convoy will be headed out, not in. It's not the two barges full of slant-eyes we're after, but the ship that brought them over."

"But how, Gunner?"

"Put salt on her tail," Blackie answered without a smile. "Ever try that stunt when you were a kid?"

"Aw, be serious, Gunner," Graveyard growled.

"I am!"

"I got yuh!" Rusty broke in. "You're gonna chase that ship, and make signals for Fog Rock to swing the compass on——"

"—and Point Hawk, for a cross bearing," Blackie finished for him. "That's it. We'll get on her tail, and stay on her tail, and keep making signals, till whatever ship the commandant sends out overhauls us. She can't get away."

"Now wait a minute, Gunner," from Graveyard. "I suspected you had something like that in your head." He grinned. "You're a foxy gunner, all right. But the point is, that ain't gonna be half as easy as it looks on paper. Sounds all right: Point Hawk and Fog Rock keep takin' our bearings and broadcastin' them to the ship on behind. Nothin' to it. We keep on the tail of the ship ahead. The ship behind keeps headin' for where the last two bearings crossed on the chart.

"All right. But the question is, how long can we last, with a half kilowatt transmitter? How long before we're out of our sending range, where neither Fog Rock nor Point Hawk can hear us?"

Shaking a finger at the transmitting apparatus, mounted on a panel against the after bulkhead, Blackie answered:

"I can boost that little baby to where she'll deliver us twelve amps. radiation. We're good for a hundred and fifty miles, at night. And if the ship behind don't overhaul us in that time——"

"That's it," Wildflower snapped in, "if she don't overhaul us. And about that time our gas is all gone; a hundred and fifty miles 'll just about run us dry. There we are—a hundred and fifty miles out, and no gas."

"That's gasin', boy, that's gasin'," Graveyard came in. "There we are, is right. No gas, no juice. We can't move; we can't yell for help. We're——"

"Aw, dry up, the pair o' you!" snapped Rusty. "In a pinch we can sew our socks and shirts together and come back under sail!"

"You're crazy, Rusty."

"I ain't yellow!"

"Stow it, stow it," Blackie cut in. "The point is, we've got to stand watches today up on the peak. Rusty, suppose you and I take it till noon, and Graveyard and Wildy this afternoon. All we've got to do is watch that black speck. My hunch is that some time this afternoon that speck will split into two specks, one heading east, the other west. And about that time the *Wild Oats* wants to be getting under weigh."

* * *

BLACKIE'S hunch materialized. Late in the afternoon Graveyard and Wildflower came galloping and skidding down from the peak and jumped into the skiff. Blackie and Rusty saw them coming and had the anchor hoisted and secured when the two pulled alongside.

"They're headin' in, Gunner, they're headin' in!" panted Graveyard, as he jumped aboard. "They're all in a row—a little one, a big one, another little one, another big one. And the first little one's on the east end of the parade."

They hoisted the skiff. Rusty took the wheel and Wildflower the engine, Blackie and Graveyard climbed up on top of the cabin and away galloped the *Wild Oats* toward the island's eastern end.

"We couldn't make out whether or not they're low in the water, loaded," Graveyard said to Blackie.

"Well, we'll soon find out," said the gunner. "But how about *her*—the ship? Did she look to be moving?"

"Couldn't tell. And we didn't want to lose any time waitin' to see."

The *Wild Oats* cleared the eastern end of Blue Rock and pointed north. The exhaust aft sputtered into a hum, as Wildy fed her the gas. Wildy could get more out of that engine than its designers had put into it. Her bow rose and her stern settled low, as she gathered speed. Imperceptibly she slipped from twelve up to fifteen knots, and then to seventeen. The water parted and rose before her, like two big white wings, one on each side of the bow. But not a drop of it fell on board. For such was the flaring cut of her bows that only when the wind blew did her decks get wet.

Blackie saw the row of black specks first. He saw just what Graveyard and Wildflower had seen from up on the peak, two small ones and two large ones, two towing launches and two barges. He focused and strained, training his glasses first on one barge then on the other. He was unable to make out whether they were high or low in the water. But the four objects were opening out wider and growing larger rapidly—too rapidly to suit Blackie. He leaned over and shouted down to Rusty at the wheel:

"Slow 'er down, lad, slow 'er down! About five knots—five!"

Rusty repeated the order to Wildflower through the voice-tube. The two white wings fell away as she slowed down, and the hum of the exhaust aft diminished to a low even purr. She just crept along.

"It wouldn't do to go tearing up on 'em like that," Blackie said to Graveyard.

"Sure not. If they see us they're liable to scud back to that ship, and all our trouble is for nothin'."

Blackie was training his glasses ahead again.

"But I do want to be half way sure they're loaded before I radio the dope in to the commandant," he said. Then training his glasses on the horizon to the left: "But say, I don't see *her*—that ship. Do you?"

For a few moments both searched the horizon to the northwest. They could make out nothing—only a dark gray line where sea and sky met.

"She's gone, Graveyard! She's China bound!"

They lowered their glasses and looked at each other.

"She dumped her load onto those two barges, and then scudded," Blackie added, lifting his glasses.

In silence they studied the inbound parade of objects.

"Well, we can't put salt on 'er tail till we find 'er," observed Graveyard presently. "And it won't be daylight for long."

Blackie continued concentrating on the procession ahead. The four black specks were now taking on detail.

"Yes, sir!" Blackie ejaculated finally. "They're low in the water, Graveyard! They're loaded!"

"I think so too," Graveyard responded

They jumped down on the engine-room hatch and then entered the cabin.

"Put her on west, lad," Blackie said to Rusty. "And tell Wildy to give her all she's got."

The gunner then sat down at the radio desk and wrote out a message to the commandant of the naval station in Felgo, reporting the two barges, stating what he purposed trying to do, and requesting instructions. This he gave to Graveyard to put in code and send, adding:

"Send it via Fog Rock. That'll let our gang know we're not shipwrecked."

Blackie then climbed up on top of the cabin again. The *Wild Oats* was now streaking westward, with her big white wings spread out high and wide. As soon as the two eastbound tows dropped out of sight off the starboard quarter, Blackie shouted down to-Rusty to bring her around a little to the north'ard. Her long pointed bowsprit swung slowly across the horizon. When she came around to northwest Blackie shouted, "Steady!" Rusty met her, and steady she went.

Blackie was by no means positive those two barges were laden with aliens. They were laden with something — something they hadn't got out of the water. He didn't have time to stop and investigate. The day was slipping away, and so was that ship out over the horizon.

An hour later Blackie raised her. And none too soon, for twilight was fast merging into night.

He focussed his glasses and strained his eyes. The speck to the westward soon swelled to a cloud of smoke. The cloud stretched out into a long, thin streak of black that slowly rose above the horizon. It looked like a distant railroad train racing across the sky.

The *Wild Oats* fairly flew. Up on the head-end of that long column of smoke Blackie soon made out the form of a ship. She grew larger rapidly. But at the same time she became less and less distinct, so swiftly was the black of night shutting down over the Pacific and blurring her outline. The nearer the little black yacht approached her the harder Blackie had to strain to see her. She was melting right away into the black background.

And then, just when she seemed about to be swallowed up, the ship ahead began showing lights. Blackie blinked, then laughed, then broke into an Indian war dance. Singing *tum-tum-te-tum*, he went hopping about in a circle on top of the cabin. This overhead racket brought Graveyard bouncing up out of the chair at the radio desk and galloping wild-eyed out on the foc'sle.

"Hey, Gunner, you queered me out of the tail-end of a message!" he snarled.

"Oh, ye-ah?" And Blackie chuckled. "But Graveyard, take a slant ahead."

Graveyard looked. Three dim yellow eyes blinked back at him out of the darkness.

"What's the message?" asked Blackie, dropping down on the foc'sle.

"I don't know yet. It's in code. You blocked out the end of it with your jumpin' on the deck up there right over my head."

Blackie laughed, and entered the cabin. He turned off the light in the binnacle hood. Then he took the wheel from Rusty.

"Jump aft, Rusty," he said, "and give Wildy a hand darkening ship. Cover every hole and crack and tell him to use only what light he has to." Then to Graveyard: "Break out the code book and see what that message is."

"What, without light?"

"Take that little flashlight in the drawer there, and pull a blanket over your head."

Then for fifteen minutes Blackie kept Wildflower busy at buzzer and voice-tube. By gradual changes he finally got the speed of the *Wild Oats* regulated to that of the ship ahead, which was about nine knots. Her lights held steady at about a mile ahead, neither dimming nor growing brighter.

Graveyard finished decoding the commandant's message, which was a reply to the one Blackie had sent an hour before. From under the blanket he called it out.

> "Blackhurst, to facilitate, use no call letters. Everything broadcast. Broadcast your speed and course every hour, or oftener if sudden change of course makes necessary. Send nothing else unless extremely urgent.
>
> Point Hawk and Fog Rock have been instructed to listen for *Wild Oats* continuously, and will take radio compass bearings. Cutter *McDough* has . . . ."

"I suppose the rest of it was, 'has been sent in pursuit'," Graveyard finished.

"The *McDough!*" And then Blackie laughed.

The revenue cutter *McDough* was the joke of the Pacific coast. She was old and rusty and duck-like.

"We're fools, Gunner, we're fools!" declared Graveyard, shedding his blanket and coming forward to the wheel. "Let's head back for Fog Rock. Why, the *McDough* can't do eleven knots on forced draft! We're makin' how much?"

"About nine, as near as I can judge."

"All right. She'll gain two miles an hour on us—if she's lucky. Figure. We had a fifty-mile start. If she didn't go fluey, the *McDough* would overhaul us tomorrow night about this time—if we had the gas to run that long. The commandant's got a whole hatful o' brains sendin' that scow out!"

"Well, he probably thinks——"

"Thinks ——, pardon me, Gunner," Graveyard broke in. "They don't do any thinkin' back there in that office. I'll tell you what they think. They think they'll have a —— of a lot o' fun tonight, sittin' around a desk stickin' pins in a chart.

"Oh, yes! Fine game o' tiddle-de-dum for that gang o' chair warmers! They'll get our bearings every hour from Point Hawk and Fog Rock. Every hour they'll stick a pin in the chart where the *Wild Oats* is. Lots o' fun they'll have, sittin' there followin' us to Siberia. Wha'd yuh say, Gunner?"

"Here, take this wheel," Blackie answered. "I'm going to let that old boy know just how we're fixed."

With that he went back to the radio desk, took the code book, pulled the blanket over him, switched on his flashlight and got busy. He wrote out a message to the commandant in Felgo, in which he reported course and speed, adding that owing to her low supply of gasoline the *Wild Oats* couldn't run for many hours. After coding this he sent it, broadcast, or "wild," that is, without making any call letters, sent only the text, without origin or address.

The station in Felgo gave no acknowledgment. But shortly after Blackie closed off from sending in came the powerful, high-frequency spark of Fog Rock, his own station, and broadcast three code groups. The gunner grunted in satisfaction; his gang was on the job. And the instant Fog Rock finished in came Point Hawk, a hundred and twenty miles to the north, with three code groups. Blackie grunted again.

That was the stuff — navy team-work.

Grinning, Blackie tuned and listened. He heard nothing further. Then he busied himself looking up the code groups sent out by the two stations. These were numerals —bearings. That settled it. All was well. The skipper on the ship behind had only to string off these bearings on his chart, and head for the intersection.

Then suddenly all was *not* well.

"What the ——!" snapped Graveyard. "Oh, Gunner, look! She's gone! She got wise! She heard our spark and doused lights!"

But by now Blackie was out on the foc'sle, peering ahead into the blackness.

"You're all right, Graveyard," he called back. "Steady! I see her! Tell Wildy to kick 'er up another knot. Where's that guy Rusty?"

"Right here, Gunner," answered Rusty, behind him. "We covered everything aft, sir. There ain't a streak as thick as a thread showin'."

"Atta boy. Now Rusty, get a blanket and wrap it around the binnacle hood. Leave just a little hole for the man steering to look through. She heard our spark and doused her lights. We've got to steer by the compass."

"I got yuh!"

IT WAS a black starless night with a cold sticky mist in the air, and Blackie and his three tars were anything but comfortable. Graveyard's bones rattled as he danced up and down at the wheel to keep warm. Wrapped in two blankets Rusty dozed and listened in at the radio desk. Back in the engine room Wildflower was well-nigh smothered for air—for he had to have sufficient light to see the engine by, and therefore had to keep every crack covered. Up forward in the bows Blackie squatted on deck, yawning, shivering, his eyes on the black object ahead.

She showed not the dimmest glimmer of a light, that ship. But she might as well have been lighted up with a million candlepower. For not a move of hers escaped those keen black eyes on the little black leech behind her. The little black leech just hung right on.

Shortly after eight o'clock she changed her course sharply to the north. Twenty minutes later she came back on west again. But Blackie and his tars only laughed. Then at nine o'clock, when broadcasting the hourly speed and course Blackie had Rusty add to the message a report of those changes and the exact time of each change. This of course all went out wild, in code, so that no one knew who was who or what was what but those intimately concerned.

"Let 'er zigzag," laughed Blackie to Graveyard, while Rusty was sending the message. "That helps us. It cuts down the distance the *McDough* has to run to overhaul us."

They listened to the spark-gap sing off the message Rusty was sending. He finished finally and closed off to receive. A few moments later he reported:

"O.K., Gunner. They both got us. But Point Hawk says Q.R.Z.*"

"Yes, I expected that," Blackie said. "We'll have to use more sending-power from now on."

"Do you think this hooker ahead of us can see us?" asked Graveyard.

"No," Blackie answered. "But her operator must know that some one's close behind, with our spark rolling in all over his set. We're close enough to knock the 'phones off his head."

"Hey!" snapped the blanket - muffled voice of Rusty, "pipe down a minute!"

"He's got a bite," Blackie whispered, and then went forward on the foc'sle to resume his lookout.

But barely had he squatted on deck when something happened that caused Blackie to leap to his feet again. A long streak of light suddenly shot forth across the blackness ahead. It held for a few seconds, then broke. In a few moments it flashed again, and this time it held steady, growing sharper, whiter—till it looked like a chalk-line across a blackboard. Then it swept downward, and began dancing to and fro over the water.

Playing in circles on the water the long white ray came slowly around till it pointed toward the *Wild Oats*. And then Blackie forgot Rusty was receiving a message and laughed loudly—for the beam of light fell short of the *Wild Oats* by a good hundred yards.

"She knows, but she don't know," Blackie chortled through the window to Graveyard. "And she hasn't got searchlight juice enough to reach——"

"Hey *Gunner!*" shouted Rusty.

---

*Q.R.Z.—Your signals are weak.

"Um-m," Blackie grunted. "I forgot."

With that he returned forward and squatted on deck again. Chuckling to himself he sat there watching the searchlight ahead sweep over the water. Minutes passed. Finally it burrowed in on the gunner that the ray of light was growing dim. He blinked. Was it his eyes? Or was it in the searchlight itself—the carbons, or a weakened source of supply? Or was she crawling away? No, he concluded. It was the ever-thickening mist—the air was growing thicker and stickier all the time.

"Say, Graveyard," he called back, "does that light look to be dying out to you?"

"Why—" Graveyard began.

And then the searchlight went out, and they could see nothing.

"Tell Wildy to kick on another knot," Blackie sang out.

No further word was spoken for several minutes. The only noise was the swish of the racing water and the low hum of the exhaust aft. Crouched up in the bows Blackie fairly sweated blood. Then suddenly he emitted a grunt, as he made her out again.

"All right, Graveyard," he called back. "Tell Wildly to ease 'er down again."

Rusty now came forward and touched Blackie on the shoulder.

"That message was from the *McDough*, Gunner," he reported.

"To us?"

"No. To Felgo. It's in there on the desk, all decoded. You had the right hunch about them two barges. They were loaded with pigtails." He paused a moment. Then: "But, roarin' rats, Gunner—she only just picked 'em up an hour ago!"

Blackie jumped up and went back to the desk, pulled the blanket over him, switched on the flashlight and read the intercepted message. It was from the captain of the *McDough* to the commandant in Felgo, reporting that he had picked up the two barges reported by the *Wild Oats*, and that they contained two hundred and seventy aliens.

But, as Rusty had said—she had only just picked them up. She was miles and miles behind. The *Wild Oats* was now nearly a hundred miles out. And, it should be repeated, the *McDough*, old, rusty, duck-like tub that she was, couldn't do better than eleven knots—she was gaining but two miles an hour on them.

Blackie growled. Then he went forward and buzzed Wildy to the voice-tube.

"Wildly, how much gas have we got left?" he began.

"Oh, we're pretty well fixed," Wildflower replied cheerfully. "We're good for about three hours."

"Three hours!"

"Sure. I've been nursin' it."

"Three hours! But ——'s fire, Wildy, we've got to run longer than that! The doggone *McDough* stopped to pick up those barges. She's hours and hours behind us!"

A short silence; then Wildy replied:

"That sure is a —— of a note. At that rate I don't see any use in us hangin' on, Gunner. Not only that. Our storage-battery voltage is low. If you're gonna use the motor-generator many more times to send we'll have to charge the bats. And there goes more gas."

Blackie grunted. It did look like a losing game. And then from out on the foc'sle Rusty called:

"Hey, Gunner, we'll have to ease up closer. I can't make this hooker out."

"Oh, Wildy," Blackie said through the tube, "kick on another knot. Things are fogging up."

INDEED it was fogging up. So thick and sticky was the air now that it took a stretch of Blackie's imagination to make out the ship ahead. Squatting up in the bows he kept calling back to Graveyard, "Speed 'er up"—"That's well"—"Steady." And the *Wild Oats* crept up on the chase, till she was less than five hundred yards off her prey. As fast as the fog settled, she closed up.

At ten o'clock Rusty sent out the hourly report of speed and course. Fog Rock came back instantly with the broadcast bearing. So did Point Hawk, but, when broadcasting hers, added the word "doubtful."

"Oh, well," said Blackie, when Rusty reported this to him, "as long as Fog Rock gets us we're hunky-dory. The *McDough* has our ten o'clock position; with that as a starting point, and a bearing each hour from Fog Rock, she ought to be able to sniff along. Say, go back and buzz Wildly for another knot."

Rusty went. In a few seconds he returned and squatted beside the gunner.

"Wildy says he ain't got many knots left, Gunner."

Blackie made no reply.

"I say Wildy says——"

"I heard you, Rusty. Keep quiet. Listen. Hear anything?"

Rusty tilted his head and listened. For a few minutes he heard only the low sputtering of the exhaust aft and the murmur of racing water. Then suddenly he heard something else — the noise of splashing, tumbling water. He leaped up and stood peering at the vague black object ahead.

"——!" he snapped. "Are we that close to 'er!"

"We must be," laughed the gunner. That's her propeller you hear. Jump aft and tell Wildy that's well."

Rusty went in the cabin and repeated the order through the tube—

"That's well."

"Ain't no such —— thing!" Wildy shot back. "The gas, tell the gunner—ten miles more'll drain us!"

"Aw, go to ——!" Rusty snapped him off. Then he turned to Graveyard at the wheel. "What are you steerin' by, chief, the compass?"

"Yes—when I can't see her."

"See 'er! You don't need to see nothin'. Lean out the window and you'll hear 'er propeller."

"You're crazy," Graveyard replied. But a moment later he took it back. "By Jerry, you're right!" Then raising his voice: "What are you doin', Gunner, feedin' the fishes?"

No reply came back from the gunner. Rusty danced out of the cabin and forward. Up in the extreme bow he found Blackie stretched out flatly on his belly, his head and shoulders hanging down over the side.

"Hey, Gunner, what the ——?" from Rusty.

"Hold 'er steady, Graveyard," Blackie called, his voice coming from low down, down near the water. Then: "Rusty, look who's here!"

Rusty dropped on his belly beside the gunner. Together they gazed down into the black racing water.

What Blackie had his eye on was a very tiny thing, a thing that rotated, spun in the water and ran along neck-and-neck with the *Wild Oats*. It looked like a small fish, giving them a race. This was the log of the ship ahead—a small rotary device, which is trailed astern on one end of a line the other end of which connects with an apparatus aboard that records the distance traversed.

"Well?" Blackie said, after they had lain there for several minutes looking down at the spinning thing. "Do you think we can pull it, Rusty?"

Rusty laughed.

"I got yuh. Fish it up, eh?—and make fast?"

"Why, sure. Let 'er tow us. Save our gas. What time is it?"

"Ten thirty."

Blackie was thoughtful for a few moments.

"We'd better wait till after eleven," he said finally. "Her quartermaster 'll come aft on the hour to read the log and of course he'd notice something was wrong. But after eleven, lad—" He gave Rusty a thump on the back that made him grunt.

"I'll get the boat hook," said Rusty, getting up and starting aft.

"Also that coil of one-inch line back on the hatch, lad," Blackie called after him.

NO HOURLY broadcast went out from the *Wild Oats'* antenna at eleven o'clock. Blackie's main reason for skipping this report was to conserve gasoline. The storage-battery that fed the radio motor generator was low of charge; and to charge it necessitated running the charging-engine and dynamo, which meant a consumption of precious gas. Besides that, as close as she now was to the ship ahead, if the *Wild Oats* opened up with her transmitting set the chances were she would well-nigh burst the ear drums of the other ship's operator. Those ear drums didn't matter, of course. But that searchlight did matter. Blackie didn't want to see that stream of light come dancing about over the water just now. The thing to do was to keep silence.

At five minutes after eleven, on the end of a boat hook, Blackie fished that ship's log line up out of the water. To it he bent an end of the coil of one-inch Rusty had fetched. With this he took a turn around a deck cleat, and then stood by to slack off.

"Tell Wildy to stop 'er," he said.

The exhaust aft quit sputtering. The *Wild Oats* began falling back. Blackie paid out about a hundred feet of his one-inch line. Then he made fast. The *Wild Oats* went right along, on the end of a tow line.

It was impossible to tell whether the log-line led from the port or the starboard rail of the ship ahead. Knowing this it would have been an easy matter to hold the *Wild Oats* off to either side, with the helm hard over, so that she towed obliquely, and thus prevent the line from fouling the propeller. The log-line is usually trailed from the lee rail. But there was no lee side that night. There was no wind. There was nothing but fog, thick, sticky fog that was growing thicker and stickier all the time.

"Just let 'er ride along with the helm 'midships," Blackie said to Graveyard. "If it fouls her propeller it'll part, I guess—give us a yank or two, maybe—no telling."

The line didn't foul, however. The *Wild Oats* rode along smoothly. A half hour passed. She was still riding.

"But we'll have to turn loose of it at a little before twelve," Blackie announced. "We'll pick it up again, of course. The idea is to give her quartermaster a chance to take his midnight reading."

"Midnight reading!" Graveyard laughed. "But what's he gonna say when he finds she ain't logged nothin' for that hour?"

"Why, he'll think his log got tangled with a piece of seaweed," Blackie answered. "But say, I hate to turn loose of 'er. It'll be tough stuff staying on 'er tail in this."

"I don't see how the blazes we're *gonna* stay on 'er tail," Graveyard replied. "All we can go by is the noise of her propeller. It's fool's business runnin' too close. She changes her course suddenly and, squash, we're all hamburg steak!"

So dense was the fog now that they could see nothing. It descended about them in swirling sticky woolpacks, thick enough to bite chunks from. They were drenched to the skin and chilled to the marrow. The ship ahead? They could hear the splash of the water churned up by her propeller—that was all.

"Just the same, we'll have to turn loose of 'er," Blackie replied at length. "What time is it?"

"Ten minutes to twelve, Gunner," replied Rusty, who was now back at the radio desk listening in. "How about sendin' our midnight——"

The rest of Rusty's sentence was blocked out by a wild, piercing shriek that came out of the blackness ahead. She had cut loose with her fog whistle.

"Atta boy!" With which Blackie entered the cabin and buzzed Wildflower to the tube.

"Start up slow, Wildy," he said to the man aft, "and gradually increase. When we give you a long buzz, hold 'er at that."

As he stepped out on the foc'sle the ship ahead whistled again.

"Boy, that makes things Jacob," the gunner observed, as he stooped over and felt for the line about the deck cleat. "Let 'er screech. So say we all of us. If she keeps that whistle tooting for about ten minutes, we'll give her quartermaster a chance to take his midnight log reading."

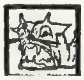
"How about our midnight report, Gunner?" Rusty sang out again from back at the radio desk.

"Hold it up. Too busy."

With that Blackie threw one turn of the line off the cleat. The noise of the exhaust aft told him that Wildy had started the engine. Her propeller was churning and he felt the pulse and throb of her. Gradually she came up to the speed of the ship ahead. The line in his hand slackened. He hauled in till he had the other ship's log-line in hand. Then, as he came up the knot, "Give Wildy a buzz," he said to Graveyard.

Graveyard pushed the button. Wildflower answered with a buzz. The hum of the exhaust held low and steady. She settled down at that speed. The whistle ahead shrilled again.

"All right, Graveyard, here she goes," said Blackie, tossing the log-line into the water. "Steer by your ears now, old socks."



"BLITHERIN' bats!"

It came from Rusty. It was followed by a metallic thud, *clump*, which told the other two that Rusty had abruptly and violently thrown the lightning-switch. The next moment Rusty came galloping out on the foc'sle with the wild zest of a man fleeing from a horde of things horrible.

"What's the matter?" from Blackie.

"Oh, nothin' at all!" Rusty roared hoarsely. "Just go back there and put on them 'phones and yank that switch!"

"I don't think I will," Blackie laughed. "But what is it?"

"Nothin'! She just opened up on full juice and liked to knock my block off, that's all!"

"Who?"

"Who! This wagon ahead of us, of course!"

Another long, wailing shriek from ahead, and so close was she now that it came from high up. They could plainly hear the churn and splash of her propeller.

"Tell Wildy to ease 'er down a little," Blackie said to Graveyard. Then to Rusty: "But why should this baby ahead of us open up with her radio? That'd be a dead give-away. Like holding her tail out for us to sprinkle salt on."

"I don't know, Gunner. All I know is she —— near busted my ear drums."

"Rusty, I think you're full of cheese."

With that Blackie went back to the radio desk. He remained back there listening in for five minutes. When he returned forward and joined Rusty he was laughing to himself.

"Rusty, I *know* you're full of cheese," he said with positiveness. "That wasn't this hooker ahead of us you heard. That was the baby behind us."

"Aw get out, Gunner! The *McDough* didn't pick up them barges till about eight o'clock. The *McDough* make ninety or a hundred miles in four hours? Did you hear 'er?"

"No. But I did hear Point Hawk and Fog Rock; and they both sent bearings. I didn't bother copying them, but I knew the code groups were numerals. You got your jolt from the hooker behind us, lad."

"But, Gunner, only an eighteen-or twenty-knot ship could overhaul us in that time! I tell you she was close—she couldn't be a quarter of a mile away! Wonder she didn't burn the set out!"

"Well, Rusty, there was a twenty-one-knot ship back there in Felgo Bay the other——"

Blackie didn't finish. Just then something happened. They had overlooked another precaution ships take when running in a fog—that of running slow. The *Wild Oats* was gliding along at nine knots, close under the stern of the invisible ship, when the invisible ship slackened her speed to one-third.

The thunderous rumble and crash of her propeller burst out of the blackness just ahead of them. From smooth, quiet water they had run headlong into a boiling, seething turmoil. The *Wild Oats* was tossing violently. The water thrown up by the rumbling propeller poured over them.

There wasn't time to do anything. They were in it and out of it in two seconds. Luck and luck only prevented them from being pulped. They swerved clear of the tumbling commotion by a very few feet.

Blackie lunged into the cabin, gave Wildflower a buzz to stop, then lunged out on the foc'sle again.

The huge black hull of the steamer loomed up alongside. With her engine stopped the *Wild Oats* shot ahead, parallel with her. She was close, this long, high thing of black—a dozen feet away. Again that shriek from her whistle, from directly overhead now, for the *Wild Oats*, forging ahead on momentum, had passed amidships of her.

"Steady, Graveyard!" Blackie hissed through the window. Then he took a step forward and stood looking up.

A dull red eye glowered down out of the black from a little abaft of them—her port side light. That alone told Blackie they were forward of the steamer's bridge; they couldn't see the bridge-wing. The fog was thick as battleship smoke. It dimmed, that red eye, as the *Wild Oats* forged farther ahead, dimmed and died. The whistle screeched again, now from well abaft of them.

Blackie held out his hand. He couldn't reach her. He leaned, leaned far outboard, stretching every ligament from shoulder to finger-tips—and still he couldn't reach her. Meanwhile he was reaching out in another way—mentally.

Blackie had a reputation for being a quick grasper of situations. In a pinch he could always be relied upon to do something. He didn't always make the best move under the circumstances—but he always *moved*.

He kicked over a rope fender at his feet, stepped forward and kicked over another, then turned and whispered to Rusty to run back and kick over the after fenders. After which he turned and said through the window to Graveyard:

"Bring 'er in!"

"Got yuh," Graveyard grunted, and threw the helm first to port and then to starboard.

She skewed in alongside. There was a dull thud, as she bumped, followed by the squeaking, crunching noise of the rope fenders rubbing against the steamer's side. Again the wild wail of her whistle, now from directly overhead, for the *Wild Oats* had run out her spurt, and now the steamer was forging ahead.

She forged faster and faster. Blackie felt the rough hull of her rubbing against his palms. She was slipping away. There was nothing to catch hold of; all he could feel was the rough surface of iron plates. He tried to dig his fingers into them. No use; she kept slipping away. He let loose an oath, as an acute sting told him of a two-inch gash in his left palm, torn by a sharp barnacle. But in the same breath he gave a grunt of satisfaction as his fingers caught on the sharp jutting edge of one of her plates. He dug and held. He had only a quarter of an inch of projection to hold to—and with the tips of his fingers. But into those finger-tips he threw all that was in Blackie. And the squeak and groan of the rope fenders ceased. The *Wild Oats* went along.

But here was no easy task. Of course, once started she went right along. But in clutching at that sharp edge he couldn't help at the same time exerting a lateral pressure that tended to push her off. Graveyard helped him in this, by throwing the helm hard a-port. That helped hold her nose in. Yet it took all Blackie had to cling to the edge of that plate. He grunted and strained, and wondered why Rusty didn't come forward and lend a hand.

Minutes passed before Rusty returned forward. He found Blackie panting and snorting like a locomotive but still holding on. Instead of lending a hand, Rusty merely stood at his side, snickering in his ear.

"What are yuh sweatin' about, Gunner?" he whispered presently. "She's fast."

Blackie eased up on his finger-tips. Sure enough! She went right along! He let go. She still went along.

"Where 've you got her fast?" he panted.

"Back amidships. I found an iron ladder. Want to go aboard 'er? Come on."

Blackie followed Rusty aft through the cabin and out on the passageway. Sure enough; fast she was. Rusty had moored her to one of the lower rungs of a stationary ladder that led up the steamer's side.

"You're a hoss, lad," Blackie said, and patted Rusty on the back. "Let's get inside and talk things over."

In the dark cabin they stood grinning silently at one another—for though their predicament was a precarious one it had its funny side. So far they had got away with it. No voice spoke down from above. All they heard was the shriek of the fog-whistle every half minute.

"But here's the trouble," said Blackie, after a while: "We can't send our reports. If we opened up right here along side of her, we'd knock her operator silly. We'd have all hands out at the rail before we finished sending. They'd bury us at sea, *Wild Oats* and all."

"I'd say keep quiet," said Graveyard.

"Then how is the ship follerin' us gonna know where we are?" from Rusty. "They ain't swung their compasses on us in two hours."

They heard eight bells, midnight, from up forward on the steamer's bridge, and following this the voices of the lookouts passing the hail.

"In the first place," said Blackie, "it wouldn't do us much good to send with *our* set, now. Out battery is low. Point Hawk wouldn't hear us; and it's doubtful whether Fog Rock would. And we can't run our charging generator without kicking up a racket."

"Nor without runnin' the gas tank bone dry," put in Wildflower, "and leaving us unable to move."

"But we've got to *send*," Blackie went on. "There's a ship behind us—close behind."

"I'll say she is," said Rusty. "Just that close that my ears are buzzin' yet."

"But she's not close enough, lad, to hear this fog whistle," Blackie continued. "She might be close enough to roll in like a ton of brick, by radio—but if she's not in hearing range of this one's whistle the only way we can let her know where we are is to make signals for Fog Rock and Point Hawk to swing their compasses on. If she don't get those bearings she can't locate us."

He paused. The others remained silent, for they knew the gunner was about to "cut a watermelon."

"We've got to go up that ladder," Blackie went on. "We've got to go aboard her, find her radio shack, put her operator out of commission, temporarily—and then open up full blast with her set and make signals for Fog Rock and Point Hawk to swing their compasses on."

A short silence. Then Graveyard said:

"The chances of us gettin' our blocks knocked off are —— good."

"I'll say so," responded Wildflower.

"What do you think about it, Rusty?"

"I say let's go."

"All right, lad," laughed Blackie. "You and I."

"Aw, hold on, hold on! Where do you get that!" protested Graveyard and Wildy.

"Rusty spoke first," Blackie checked them. "And we have to leave two aboard—one for the wheel and one for the engine. Come on, Rusty. All we've got to do is find the radio shack, and then scare about eighteen kinds of epileptic fits into the operator—and we're hunky-dory."

The other two protested further, but it availed them nothing. Blackie led the procession aft to the foot of the ladder to which the *Wild Oats* was moored.

"Keep your ears cocked," he whispered. "We might get into a mess and lose out on getting back. Or we might just get back, without any extra seconds. Be ready to shove off. If you have to shove off without us, why, shove off without us—and stay on 'er tail."

And he started up the ladder with Rusty at his heels. A dozen rungs up and the two were swallowed by the blackness.

THEY sat astraddle of the steamer's rail on what, from the height they had climbed, Blackie thought must be the bridge-deck. They could see nothing. They heard the near-by footfalls of some one going forward. Less than ten feet inboard from them the man passed; yet they couldn't see him, so dense and black was it.

They sat there, swallowing mouthfuls of fog and wondering, wondering where was the radio office—forward, aft or amidships. Once they located that they would be sailing fine. It would be no trick to jar the operator inside out, so to speak—throw such a scare into him that he would be only too glad to give them the lay of the switches and buttons for starting his transmitting set.

"We'll make him boost 'er up and tune 'er up till the hot-wire ammeter hits the bell," Blackie whispered. "Come on."

Blackie lifted his outboard leg. And then, and it came so abruptly that he all but fell overboard——

"Blitherin' bats!" shouted Rusty.

Long streaks of blinding white light shot forth out of the black fog, flashing this way and that and flooding the deck about them with flaring daylight. Life boats, ventilators, smoke-stacks leaped up out of the void-like blackness.

They looked over their shoulders into three glaring white eyes. And as they looked another, then another— In as many seconds there were six white eyes, each sending forth a long white stream that played this way and that over the steamer's decks and sides.

Came the patter and shuffle of feet in a hurry, and the growls and snarls of panic-filled voices. Monkeyish Mongolians ran to and fro like so many headless hens. The man at the whistle cord must have just given it a jerk and let go of it, for all that was emitted was a wheezing gasp.

Up on the bridge some one with a roaring bear voice was bellowing for silence; while from over in the midst of those six white eyes came a voice that Blackie knew—a voice that carried him back to the good old days when he was a dizzy gob on the happy decks of the foolish *Farallone*. Verily that was the voice of Daddy Doone, off there shouting through a megaphone—

"Steamer, there! Steamer, there!"

"Yes, sir; the new rear-admiral it was—the old boy with whom Blackie had failed to connect for a little chat, a couple of evenings before in Felgo Bay. It was the "Farry"! Blackie could tell her by the placement of her searchlights.

Things quieted down finally, and the man with the bear voice made reply. Then Daddy Doone shouted:

"Heave to or take the consequences!"

"What ship?"

Daddy Doone told him, and repeated the command—

"Heave to!"

Silence. And then, following the jangle of the engine room gong, the dull pound and throb of the engine below ceased.

"All right," bellowed the voice forward. "We're stopped. Now what's the idea?"

Daddy Doone replied: "You left something behind. Two barges full of aliens. They were picked up by the revenue cutter *McDough* last evening."

Bear-Voice let out a snort to which the roar of an enraged sea lion would have been but a whisper.

About that time Blackie and Rusty were on their way down the ladder.

"Blackhurst! Blackhurst!" shouted Daddy Doone.

Out on the foc'sle of the *Wild Oats*, in the glare of one of the Farry's searchlights, Blackie held up a hand in acknowledgment.

"Bring your craft alongside, lad," shouted the rear-admiral. "I want to send officers and men aboard that hooker."

"Aye aye, sir," Blackie responded.

This time Blackie didn't fail to connect with Daddy Doone. After putting the *Wild Oats* alongside of the *Farallone,* Blackie turned her over to Graveyard and then ran up the sea ladder. He tarried not to talk to his old shipmates crowding the rail, but proceeded straight forward along the gun deck, then up two ladders to the bridge. And there, while his three tars were transporting the boarding crew over to the other ship, Blackie had that little chat with the new rear-admiral.

Old Daddy Doone was highly tickled. He tapped on the deck with his shoes, twiddled his thumbs behind him, chuckled into his thick gray whiskers—and now and then he poked Blackie in the ribs.

Incidentally Blackie congratulated the old boy on his recent promotion, and thus opened the way for staff-duty talk. He could not have chosen a more logical time. For not a man in the Navy had a bigger drag with Daddy Doone just then than Blackie Blackhurst.

Yes, the old boy informed him; there was an open billet on that division flagship staff—but, for an ensign, not a radio gunner.

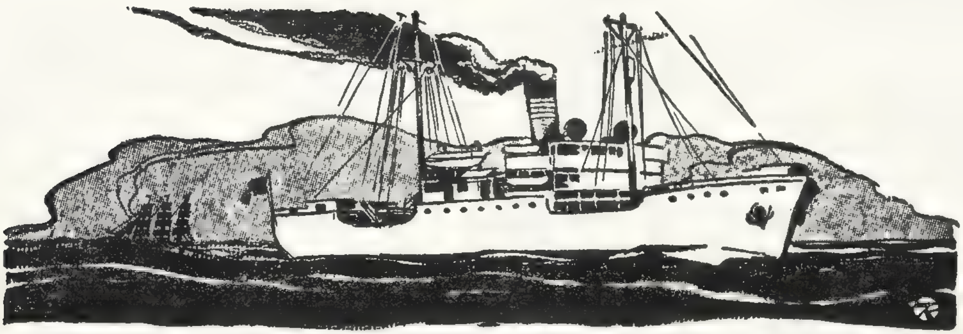
"Well, sir," Blackie replied, "I've thought of requesting the examination for ensign next month or so."

"Oh, you have, eh?" Daddy Doone snapped. "Well, you just forget that *next* business. That's Spanish. Never mind about next month or so—nor yet next week. Request that examination by radio as soon as you get back on Fog Rock. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir. Aye aye, sir."

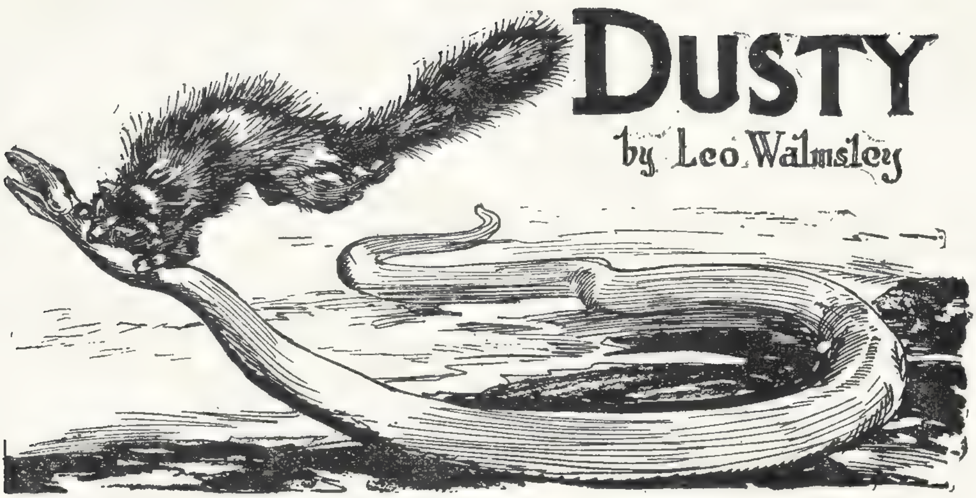
A FEW weeks later the Fog Rock gang lost their skipper. Blackie, now Ensign Blackhurst, was detached to duty as radio officer on Daddy Doone's division flagship, in the Atlantic Fleet.

Fog Rock got another good skipper, however. Graveyard was promoted to the rank of radio gunner, and took Blackie's place. Rusty went up to chief electrician, and automatically moved up to the job of executive officer of the rock, which Graveyard's advancement had left vacant. Wildflower was promoted to chief machinist's mate. He carried on as chief engineer of the *Wild Oats,* for Blackie couldn't take his yacht with him in the battleship fleet; so he left her with the gang, knowing that in the days to come, whenever he could pull the official wires for a furlough, she would be there, at Fog Rock, in tip-top shape and ready for a spurt.



DUSTY

by Leo Walmsley



Author of "Mamba the Terrible," and "Sir Mellivora."

THE termite heap, in the royal chamber of which "Dusty" was born, lay on the outskirts of the east African village beyond the thorn *zamba* that guarded old Amani's farthermost *mahinde* field from the rascally baboons. It was an unusually well built one. Doubtless Dusty's parents had thought as much when they decided to make it their home. It was constructed of fine red earth, wonderfully ground and mixed with cement, and as resistant to the heavy monsoon rains as solid rock.

There was not one of its original tenants left when Dusty's father gnawed an entrance into the base and made his first internal reconnaissance through its labyrinthian corridors to the royal chamber, where once the queen termite had held her grand nuptial court. Certainly the beach "soldier" ants could not have accounted for such a clearance. The fact of the heap's exterior being unbroken showed that no ant-bear had been at work.

But a creature like the mongoos takes life as it comes and does not bother with reasons why. Sufficient that the royal chamber, with the slightest excavation of its roof, was perfectly suited to its second and no less important purpose; and that with the addition of two extra bolt-holes at the base of the heap the place was as secure and comfortable as the most fastidious of parents could wish for the founding of a family.

Dusty had two brothers and one sister, all born within an hour of each other; but as their careers were just like those of any other mongoos, and as Dusty's was in many ways exceptional, we shall not bother to introduce them, for we are relating only such events as intimately concern the history of our hero, for hero he was as you will see. To Dusty himself the most important thing that ever happened certainly was his first coming out; for he was born—and suckled for many days—in complete darkness, and he might have been a worm for all he knew of the world that lay outside.

He was terribly frightened. He didn't want to move when his father came back from seeing that the coast was clear and nudged him out of the nest; and when at last he was actually at the threshold of the doorway he whimpered with pain and fear, for the strong light of the high noon was like red-hot coals in his little eyes, and even his nostrils hurt, so strong and unfamiliar were the scents that assailed them.

But father took no notice of his protests. He urged Dusty out into the middle of the smooth, hard, hot platform which surrounds the base of any termite heap; and then very proudly, as if he wished all the veldfolk to observe what a fine son he had got, he sat up on his haunches like a squirrel and began to clean his fur, while Dusty gradually accustomed himself to the dramatic novelty of his experience.

Dusty after all was still very, very small. One could have hidden him entirely in one hand. Father was just a little larger than an English stoat, and but that his fur was dark and minutely speckled with brown he might have passed as such at first glance.

Dusty's fur was still in the fluffy stage, so that the contour of his slender body was hidden and he looked fat and ungainly. At his first independent movement, however, to the shade of his parent's body, one would have realized that the ungainliness was more apparent than real, that he possessed all the suppleness and muscular resiliency characteristic of his tribe. From nose to tail his body seemed to undulate quite independently of the movement of his limbs. His progression was a series of smoothly curving waves.

He felt better in the shade, and so far was his belief in life restored that he stopped whimpering and actually started to wash his face, as his father was doing, with a well-licked paw. Both apparently were now quite oblivious to what was going on about them, so thoroughly engrossed were they in their occupation.

But that is one of the peculiar things about the mongoos family; they never seem to be on the lookout for danger, like most of the inhabitants of the wild. One might think, seeing them at their toilet or sunning themselves on the threshold of their lair, that they feared no enemy.

For all that there is no creature with a more sensitive nervous system, with eyesight, scent and hearing more acute. If Dusty's father was complacent, it was because he was perfectly aware of all that was happening in the immediate vicinity of his danger zone. He knew that in a thick patch of wait-a-bit thorn two hundred yards upwind, a pack of jackal were asleep; that in the shelter of old Amani's *zamba* a flock of guinea-fowl were indulging in a sand bath—watched with great interest by a ree lynx hiding in the maize and waiting for his chance. He knew that the baboons were bathing at a water hole a couple of miles away; he knew precisely where the leopard—which had killed two native dogs in the village the previous night—was lying up for the noontide hour.

Jackals, lynx, baboons, leopard, all might be reckoned among the enemies of a mongoos—*within* a mongoos' danger zone; but father knew that zone—a circle with a radius of a hundred feet and its center the termite mound—was clear of anything that might be harmful to himself or his beloved youngster; and so he went on complacently washing himself and occasionally giving Dusty hints on the technique of this highly necessary process.

But a mongoos has many other enemies in addition to the ones mentioned. Now and again father took a seemingly casual glance into the acacia-trees that ringed the termite heap, and, at all hours save noon, sent cool shadows slanting across it. The most idle of glances were they, yet marvelously comprehensive; they took in not only the acacia branches, but the blue sky above and around, all of it that was not hidden by the termite heap and the trees themselves. They revealed nothing, however, to cause concern. Except for a couple of vultures circling above the village refuse-ground, the sky was a blue, hot void.

But even the instincts and powers of observation of a mongoos are not infallible. Nature sees to that. True, there was nothing of danger in the area of observation, yet had father but moved his position a yard and glanced back along the narrow avenue of the lush masked by the termite heap he might have suddenly seen a big brown bird flying close to the ground, swiftly and noiselessly as the shadow of a sailing cloud.

How that approaching hawk knew the mongooses were out I can not tell. It had flown straight along the ground like that for a mile and had not hovered once. Perhaps it had noted the tenants of the heap on some previous occasion; incomprehensible otherwise that its course should keep so true to that line which was the one blind spot in its intended victim's eyes.

It was scarcely fifty yards from the heap when Dusty, satisfied with his toilet and now complete master of his emotions, had a sudden fancy to leave the platform and explore the fascinating area beyond it. His quick rush took father completely by surprize.

Dusty had almost reached the margin of the platform before he was aware of it; and as he darted after the foolish youngster, father gave a little scream of anger, that was abruptly silenced, however, as the hawk swept round the wall of the heap. banked steeply, turned up on his tail and then, with upraised wings and outstretched talons, sank on to the astounded baby.

But swift and unexpected as the pouncing of the hawk had been, father's movement was swifter. He did not stop to think, His action was simultaneous, automatic. In other circumstances the first sound of those whirring wings would have sent him in one leap to the safety of his lair. But now with his precious offspring in peril, his leap took him straight for the marauder, and even as the hawk, with one talon closed over Dusty's entire body, beat down with his wings for the initial ascent, the gallant little creature shot in between them and with unerring precision snapped his jaws above the closed talons into the joint of that scaly limb and closed them like a trap.

If you have ever seen a boy take the foot of a deceased goose or fowl and play at pulling the tendons that protrude like cord from the severed joint, you will know what happened. Those sharp teeth crushing through skin and bone severed every important ligature; the talons uncurled as if the owner of them were dead, and the next moment Dusty was wriggling free on the ground while father, releasing his hold, prepared to meet the hawk's attack.

But the hawk had no stomach for fighting. The pain of his broken, lacerated foot aroused no spirit of vengeance within him, only a fierce self-pity. He flew up with curiously heavy beats and, still flying heavily as if a deadly paralysis were spreading through his muscles, he ascended into the air and disappeared down-wind.

By that time there was no visible sign of Dusty and his father. Had you put your ear to the mouth of the entrance hole in the heap, however, you would have heard a most awful tumult of screams and hisses and scurrying feet, and a poignant whimpering that undoubtedly came from Dusty.

THE education of a young mongoos is not essentially different from that of any other small flesh-eating mammal. As soon as Dusty and his brothers and sister had accustomed themselves to the light of day and had learned all the special dangers likely to be encountered within immediate range of the heap they were taken farther afield. They were taught first of all how to hunt for little things such as insects and small reptiles, how to approach their quarry, how to choose the best moment for attack and when and how to bite when the vital opportunity arrived.

Instinctively they acquired a knowledge of all that was dangerous; to distinguish the scent of jackals and the cats, big and small, and various other flesh-eaters that might figure conspicuously in any moment of their lives.

Whether father or mother was instructing them in the hunting of a lizard or of a locust, they always made the children behave as if they were going to tackle the most dangerous quarry. The mongoos has no special immunity to venom and must depend almost entirely on its brain-speed agility in a fight.

In all these vital matters Dusty proved himself much the superior of his brothers and sister; and one day father, who had from the first regarded him somewhat as the favorite son, took him away on a very serious expedition. By that time the youngster had grown almost to full size; his fluff had been replaced by a covering of long, wiry, speckled hair. His teeth were long and sharp.

There was very little about the general routine of a mongoos' life that he had not learned. He had killed frogs, lizards, small salamanders, mice, rats, young birds, and was expert in the robbing of birds' nests and the sucking of eggs; but so far the game his father sought on this occasion had not come within his experience.

They left the heap an hour before noon and, keeping to the long grass, traveled a mile in the opposite direction to that of the village. It was a fine, hot day—the rains had finished six weeks back—there were few animals astir. But they passed a family of wart-hogs, grubbing for roots in the scant shade of a giant baobab, and they heard too the foolish barking of the baboons tormenting a troop of zebra who had come for their midday drink at the water hole. Father gave them a wide berth, for he loathed baboons above all things, and he halted at last at the base of another termite heap, standing all alone in a narrow glade in the bush.

Dusty had not the slightest inkling of what was in his parent's mind. He knew, however, that something very important was going to happen by the very careful way in which father peered into a small hole in the heap and then ran back and sat up on his haunches squirrel fashion, as if lost in thought.

The heap in most ways was similar to Dusty's own family residence; deserted by its original tenants and reinhabited by either mongoos or some other small mammal. But it contained no other mongoos now; even Dusty knew that when he took a sniff at the hole. It had a smell quite unfamiliar to him, yet one which excited him tremendously.

He hurried back immediately to his father. The latter, however, dropped on all fours and by some mysterious sign intimating to Dusty to remain where he was, scurried round to the rear of the ant-heap, found another hole and without a moment's hesitation entered.

Dusty had small doubt now what was in the wind. Father had gone in with the express purpose of making something come out, and whatever it was it would emerge out by the first hole. He still remained sitting up, but his whiskers were bristling as if electrically charged, and his eyes gleamed bright as they stared at the entrance.

A minute went by. Still he did not stir. At last came a faint sound, almost like the crackling of paper. He dropped on all fours and very daintily crept down to the heap and then stood back a foot maybe; and from that position he did not move until the whole of the snake—it was a young python a couple of yards in length—was clear of the heap and the reptile was wriggling quickly away toward the edge of the screening grass.

Now Dusty had never seen a snake before. Little difference did that make, however, for there was in him something that required no experience to foster—an instinctive hatred and a lust to kill, that had been handed down through countless generations of snake destroyers.

He required no parent to advise him. All in that breathless moment of the snake's appearance he had become centuries old, centuries wise. The python, of course, was non-venomous. Dusty did not know that, nor did he know why he attacked in the manner he did, although it was the one and only way in which a snake may be killed without danger; a lightning rush parallel to the reptile's line of flight, a sudden, almost somersault-turn just short of its head, and then one incredible flying bite deep into the brute's neck vertebrae and through the spinal column.

It was not a fight. It was sheer murder. The python had not a chance. Death was instantaneous.

Dusty stood back from the carcass and watched the last death tremors running like little water-ripples from head to tail. Then father emerged from the hole, calmly took in the situation, shook the dust from his fur and joined his son. Shortly, as if it might have been the hundredth snake that Dusty had killed, the two fell to work on their victim, ate their fill of the flesh and, cutting away such portions as might be conveniently carried, set off for home.

IT WAS a bright, sunny morning in the same week of the killing of the python that Dusty, thinking to have a quiet hunt by himself before the others were up, left the family nest and scurried to the main entrance hole. He had not got more than a few inches outside, however, than he felt a sharp pain in his neck and a terrible choking sensation. He stopped, felt the pain diminish, rushed, and felt it become worse. Then he sat up on his haunches and squealed for dear life.

But no kind parent came to his assistance this time. Down in the heap father and mother were aware of a sound which filled them with dismay and robbed them of every atom of courage. And Dusty heard the sound too, although he did not so readily comprehend it—the voice of a man.

"Ah, now, be careful, O Malala; hurt it not, and mind thy fingers—wait."

Once more Dusty tugged furiously to get away from the invisible thing that was holding him; but in vain. The more he tugged the more it hurt; the more it sapped his strength. He was on the point of utter exhaustion when Malala, six-year-old son of Amani, rushed excitedly from behind the heap with Amani himself close at his heels.

"Beware, I say!" continued the old man. "His teeth will be sharp."

"Father, father!" gurgled the boy delightedly. "Eh, what a beautiful one! Quick! He dies; loosen the cord!"

The old hunter took a strip of cloth from his waist, cunningly adjusted it over Dusty's head to prevent him from biting and released the throttling wire, replacing it, however, with a secure knot on one of his paws.

"There now, Malala," he said. "It is safe. But handle it with care. Come, let us go back to the house and secure it. Frighten it not or it will never become tame."

But Dusty was past fearing. His mind was paralyzed. He could see nothing because of the cloth still wrapped round his head; he could feel nothing; his muscles had gone numb. But when Amani and Malala arrived at the hut and he was deposited in the shade and the cloth was removed, then his senses came back, and with them fear; but also the indomitable courage of his race.

The end of the wire was secured to one of the supports of the hut roof. It was long enough to give him play. With his jaws dripping and his eyes gleaming rage, he ran round and round, biting at everything that came his way and trying in vain to reach the legs of his two imprisoners.

He carried on like this with intermission for the better part of an hour; then, resigned to the fact that escape for the time being was impossible, he lay down and curled up into a hot, quivering ball. Amani took his son away from Dusty and put a gourd of cool water within reach.

"He must be quiet," he advised. "He will not drink unless. And if he drinks not, assuredly he will die."

But Dusty did not come of a breed which gives up the ghost easily, but of one that is quick at adaptation. He did drink later, drank as if his whole interior were on fire; and later still, when the sun was down, his nerves were sufficiently calm to enable him to eat sparingly of the few odd pieces of raw meat which Amani allowed his son to throw on the ground by the gourd.

But with night came a great homesickness, a pitiful passion for the warm softness of the nest. He did not sleep, but tore at his wire until at last he had no strength left and he lay down exhausted.

All this, however, was to be expected, said Amani; and what Amani did not know about wild animals and the taming of such as were good to tame was not worth knowing. Apart from procuring a pet for his son, he had a serious purpose in capturing and taming this little mongoos. Amani had many stores of maize, and these of late had been sadly depleted by a murrain of rats. True, he had Ts'nek, the half-breed pariah and fox-terrier, who had been given to Malala by a passing tracker a year ago, but a dog was of little use when it came to clearing out the underground passages beneath the stores, where the rats were breeding.

Therefore Amani was very patient with Dusty; and he saw to it that Malala, who had already developed an extraordinary love for the little mongoos, did not play with it too often, but accustomed it gently to its new surroundings. It is marvelous all the same how quickly and absolutely Dusty did become tame.

By the second night of his captivity he had forgotten altogether about the termite heap. He crept into the miniature "hut" which Amani had made for him out of twigs and mud, and slept quite soundly. On the third day he made no effort to bite Malala's fingers when the boy put them near; on the fourth day he was calmly eating meal from Malala's hand.

Even more marvelous perhaps was the way he made friends with Ts'nek. Ts'nek, let it be repeated, belonged to Malala, and of the many things the boy loved, certainly he came first. The two were inseparable companions. They even slept together at night in the corner of the hut, in the afternoon in the shade of the pawpaw-tree where the breeze had full play. And in spite of the fact that Ts'nek was so jealous that he would not permit any other dog to come within fifty yards of his little master, ten days after Dusty's capture one might have seen Malala curled up on his mat beneath the tree, an arm curled lovingly round Ts'nek's hairy shoulders, and Dusty, without any wire or fastening whatever, fast asleep on his chest, looking for all the world like a fur necklet that had slipped down accidentally.

Amani was delighted that the two animals should be on friendly terms. He waited another week, however, before putting his scheme to a practical test, and by then whenever Ts'nek was lying down you would see Dusty playing about him, scurrying over his body, biting his paws and ears, sometimes so hard that the dog would yelp.

Then one day the test came. Malala, making queer little noises in his throat that were an exact mimicking of Dusty's cries, was told to walk across to the maize store, and Dusty and Ts'nek followed him as a matter of course.

"Show him the rat hole," said Amani then, for he believed in making his son take a hand at the game. "Put his little nose within and tell me if the smell pleaseth him."

There were several holes at the base of the store-hut wall. Dusty required little coaxing to put his nose to one of them; and the next moment, before the boy could seize him, he had squirmed his way inside and was lost to view.

Even Amani was not quite prepared for this. He gave an excited shout to what villagers were close at hand to call their dogs and arm themselves with sticks. Before he had grasped his own cudgel, however, the first rat ran out of another hole, and Ts'nek without a sound collared it and broke its neck. In five minutes the hut was surrounded by a mob of dogs and men, and the rats were coming out literally in dozens, bolting terror-stricken from their lairs, only to meet an almost certain fate from either dog or stick.

How many were slain during that first ten minutes of panic, cannot be said for sure. Certainly not short of a hundred, and Dusty himself had evidently accounted for a few, for when he finally emerged at one of the holes his muzzle was dripping with blood.

Malala gave a shriek of delight as he recognized his pet, for the business had not been altogether to his liking. He toddled forward with hands outstretched; but before he was near, two of the pariah dogs, unaware of the way in which the mongoos had contributed to their sport, rushed savagely at him. Like lightning Dusty turned to the hole; but its entrance was blocked by an enormous rat, one of the last to "escape," which tried in vain to give way. The next minute one of the dogs had seized hold of Dusty by the middle and lifted him clear from the ground.

What happened next is not too easy to describe. Whether Amani, seeing the danger, called to Ts'nek, or whether Ts'nek acted entirely on his own initiative, I cannot say. Enough that the half-breed terrier leaped across like a leopard, seized the pariah by the back of the neck, rolled it completely over and then went murderously for its throat.

No ordinary pariah could stand up against a dog with English blood in him. The brute would have been dead inside a couple of minutes, and possibly Dusty would have been killed as well, had not Amani and two of the villagers begun to pull them apart. And while they were thus engaged—it was no easy matter—Malala, heedless of bites and blows, wriggled into the medley, seized poor little Dusty and lifted him clear away.

"Father, father!" he shrieked, holding the trembling little body tight to his naked breast. "He lives—he lives!"

And when at last Amani had the two dogs separated and Malala and his pets were resting under the pawpaw-tree, the child turned indignantly on his father:

"I will not have the little one to hunt again. Thou must catch and train another one. Where would he be now but for the brave Ts'nek?"

"Ah, but the evil rats," answered Amani with a laugh. "Think of them—and the corn thy pet has saved. How many were there, thinkest thou—five-score? Away now and count the pest and make a fire and burn them lest they cause disease."

"Pooh! Thy rats!" Malala answered with infinite scorn. "Understand, O father, my little one shall not be used again for hunting rats."

And perhaps it was just as well that Malala won his point and that Dusty's life was not risked in such manner again.

* * *

THE love of dog for mankind, seeing that the two have been friends since the very dawn of time, is not difficult to understand. The love of a creature like the mongoos, born to the wild and all the fierceness of it, brutally captured and ruthlessly torn from its home, is beyond comprehension. Yet Dusty had love, devotion, adoration for Malala, and he loved Ts'nek only a degree the less.

The three scarcely ever left each other. They would play together for hours on end, on the doorstep or in the courtyard of Amani's hut; and scarcely a noontide but what they could be seen under the ever green pawpaw, Malala and the dog asleep, Dusty wakeful but still, and lying on the boy's chest.

One day, however—it was some months after the rat incident—Malala and Ts'nek as usual were asleep, but Dusty was not visible. The fact is Dusty had one very bad vice, which no amount of punishment would ever break him of—the stealing of hens' eggs; and if there was one time better than another for the indulging of this wickedness it was noon, by which time the fowls had laid and no one was around to interfere.

On this occasion, he had been forced to gnaw an entirely new entrance into the old hut where the fowls lived and carried out their business, the usual ones having been blocked up by Amani with lumps of stone. He had found two eggs, however, and disposed of them; and now, not without a twinge of conscience, he was on his way to the pawpaw-tree. He progressed leisurely as befits a mongoos containing the meat of two large eggs; and for a reason best known to himself he took a somewhat devious route, coming upon the tree finally from a direction that would have suggested to any pleasantly minded person that he had merely been having a drink at the spring beyond the hut.

He halted as soon as Malala and Ts'nek came into full view and took a last precautionary lick at his whiskers to make certain that no incriminating yolk adhered to them. Then, noting that both his loved ones were asleep, he advanced. But he did not reach them. The pawpaw-tree had been pruned with an idea to giving shade rather than fruit; and its broad, heavy leaves hung very close to the sleeping couple, so close that had Ts'nek but reached up a paw he might easily have touched the lowest branch.

It was on that branch—lying along it like a piece of withered wood itself, with head alone significant of life — that Dusty observed a long, thin snake, not an ordinary snake but the most terrible of all African reptiles—the mamba! The head of it was not ten inches away from the dog's head, not more than a yard away from Malala's naked shoulders. Dog and child had but to sit up, and the snake might make his choice of either.

Whether Dusty consciously realized the frightful danger that his friends were in is unimportant. That he did appreciate the fact that if he wakened either, the snake would instantly strike is evident by the careful way he approached, avoiding the boy's outstretched arm and one of the dog's paws, which blocked what would have been the most direct line of approach.

From this point, however, his eyes never left those of the snake; the two might have been doing their best to hypnotize each other. Apart from this and the slightest quivering of Dusty's tail there was nothing to indicate the demoniacal fury that possessed him, a fury that all mongooses experience when face to face with their traditional adversary.

The mongoos advanced very slowly. The movement of his limbs was so subtle that one might have thought he was swinging gently through the air. He knew that he was faced with a far more difficult problem than that which the python had offered. He must leap to make his bite—and if he missed there would be no second chance. He advanced by fractions of an inch until at last he was standing actually in the narrow triangle made by the boy's thigh and the dog's chest, and the snake's head was not a yard above him.

Then, still with his eyes fixed on those black, shiny beads, he halted, opened his mouth and gave a suppressed hiss. Ts'nek opened his eyes and sleepily closed them again. The boy did not stir. The snake, however, raised its head ever so slightly, stopped still as death and then, just like the thong of a whip, the front three-quarters of the brute came swinging down straight for Dusty's shoulders.

How Dusty dodged that blow only an ultra-rapid motion-picture camera could reveal. It usually requires all the resources of scientific photography to demonstrate, too, that swinging, turning leap of the mongoos, as well as that quick-as-lightning bite of Dusty's which missed the neck by the fraction of an inch, cut into the reptile's side and gave the mongoos sufficient grip to get his weight to bear and pull the snake clean out of the branch on to the ground. But it is beyond even the science of photography to show how it came about that when Malala, shrieking with terror, and Ts'nek, too startled to bark, got to their feet, Dusty was calmly sitting up on his haunches licking the blood from his lips, and the green mamba was stretched out almost straight as a stick before him—dead as the ground itself.

"Father! Father!" shrieked Malala.

Amani came running in terror from the hut.

"What is it, then? What is it?"

"A snake—a snake—look! It is dead!"

"Thou hast been dreaming—thou——"

But Amani suddenly caught sight of the snake. He glanced up into the pawpaw—he looked at Dusty—and then gathered his child into his arms. But Dusty went on with his toilet, wishing in the bottom of his heart that he had left those eggs alone, for only a mongoos knows how exquisite the feast of a snake can be.

OM

A SIX-PART STORY PART TWO

by Talbot Mundy

Author of "Mohammed's Tooth," "The Nine Unknown," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

WHEN Cottswold Ommony, forester in the Civil Service of India, drifted into the die-hard club at Delhi the members straightway began to gossip about him. They recalled that Jack Terry, the M. D., married Ommony's younger sister Elsa twenty years before; that an American pork packer named Marmaduke persuaded Terry to become medico at Buddhist mission which Marmaduke had established at Tilgaun; that Ommony was co-trustee with a red-headed American spinster named Hannah Sanburn who was head of the mission; and with a Tibetan Ringding Gelong Lama whom Ommony had never seen; that his enemy, Jenkins, had been appointed head of the forestry department and that Ommony had resigned.

As for Ommony, he said nothing; but pretty soon he got up and went to see his friend, John McGregor, his giant Irish wolf-hound Diana at heel. McGregor was head of the Secret Service. Their conversation developed interestingly. Jenkins had had Elsa hypnotized by the black-art swine Kananda Pal, robbed her of her mind and used her mental maladjustment as an excuse to break the engagement between them. Terry married her to save her and took her to a sacred place in the upper Abor country to have her cured. There the "Masters" live; there also is a sacred stone with magic properties. Terry and Elsa disappeared. That was twenty years ago.

McGregor also told Ommony that Miss Sanburn's adopted daughter had been robbed of a piece of crystal jade, the thief being murdered and the jade, as well as the adopted daughter, disappearing. Tin Lal, a Secret Service operative, recovered the jade and tried to sell it to Chutter Chand the jeweler. Through Chutter Chand's agency McGregor recovered the jade and since then had been importuned by a mysterious somebody to give it up. He thought that the jade might have something to do with the disappearance of the Terrys.

Suddenly hopeful of rescuing his sister, Ommony determined to inspect the Buddhist mission at Tilgaun as a pretext, then slip away on the desperate chance of penetrating the perilous unexplored upper Abor country, whence no stranger had ever returned.

Before starting he took the jade to his friend Chutter Chand, the jeweler. Chutter Chand said that in his opinion the jade had been broken off from a much larger piece and sensitized in very ancient times by a prehistoric race of superscientists, with the result that the stone reflects the whole of the holder's thought and character from the very day he was born. The jeweler added that he thought the "Masters" of the upper Abor guarded the forgotten secrets of the superscientists with the idea of letting them out a little at a time as the world was prepared to receive them. He was in abject terror, for a mysterious visitor had threatened him with death if he did not return the stone.

Just then an old Tibetan lama entered with his young *chela* or disciple in quest of the jade. He didn't get it. Ommony sent his wolf-hound Diana to trail them to their quarters when they left and himself made friends with the Hillman whom they had posted to shadow him. The Hillman said that his name was Dawa Tsering and that he came from Spiti, where they practise polyandry. The old lama, he said, was Tsiang Samdup, a name which startled Ommony. The disciple was Samding; "some call him San-fun-ho." Then he suddenly waxed uncommunicative and disappeared.

The dog Diana returned and led Ommony to the lamas' hiding-place, where Dawa Tsering tried to knife him in the dark. Diana bit the Hillman in the neck; Ommony took the knife away from him, and the Hillman cursed the lamas.

"They told me I could come to no harm if I obeyed them and said my prayers," he added. "Their magic is useless. Give me my knife and I will go back to the Hills."

Ommony gave Dawa Tsering the address of Mrs. Cornock-Campbell, where he was to be a guest at dinner, and told the Hillman to report there

---

"Om," copyright, 1924, by Talbot Mundy.

between ten and eleven that night, when the knife would be returned. Then he drove to McGregor's office, wrapped up the jade, addressed the package to Miss Sanburn at Tilgaun and entrusted it to McGregor's most trusted operative, the Eurasian, Aaron Maculay, for delivery.

When Dawa Tsering showed up for his knife he told them that the jade had been found on a man from Abor, who had come to the Tilgaun mission for medical treatment and had died there. The stone was stolen from Miss Sanburn by a mission girl, whom the Secret Service operative Tin Lal had subsequently murdered. Tsiang Samdup had promised Dawa Tsering a great reward for recovering it. During their stay in Delhi Dawa Tsering noticed that the lama was visited a good deal by "actor people."

Just then a letter was shoved under the door, and the messenger disappeared before any one could see who he was.

CHAPTER VII

"SARCASM? I WONDER IF THAT EVER PAYS."

It is the teaching of financiers and statesmen, and of them who make laws, and of most religionists, that of all things a man should first seek safety—for his own skin—for his money—for his own soul. Yet I find this teaching strange; because of all the dangers in the universe, the greatest lies in self-preferment.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

THE letter was written on the same long, ivory-colored paper as that which had reached McGregor's office in the silver tube, but this time it was not European handwriting, although the words were English. Some one more used to a brush, such as the Chinese use, and who regarded every pen-stroke as a work of art in true relation to the whole, had taken a quill pen and almost painted what he had to say, in terse, strong sentences.

To COTTSWOLD OMMONY, ESQUIRE,
At the house of his friend.

May Destiny mete you full measure of mercy. The piece of jade is neither yours nor mine. By deeds in the valley of indecision a soul ascends or descends. You are one to whom reward is no inducement; to whom honor is no more than wealth—a pleasing substitute for right doing. There is nothing done in this life that is not balanced by justice in the lives to come; and the ultimate is peace. So do. And not by another's hand are deeds done; nor is the end accomplished without doing all that lies at the beginning. Thus the beginning is the end, and the end the beginning, as a circle having no beginning and no end, from which is no escape but by the Middle Way, which lies not yonder but at the feet of him who searches.

Take the stone to Tilgaun, which is one stage of the journey to the place whence it came. From Tilgaun onward let those be responsible on whom the burden falls. There is danger in another's duty. Peace be with you. Peace give you peace that you may multiply it.

TSIANG SAMDUP.

Mrs. Cornock-Cambell read the letter aloud. Not smiling, she passed it to Ommony and watched his face. He read it twice, frowning, and gave it to McGregor, who emitted his staccato, fox-bark laugh, which Diana heard and answered with one deep, musical bay from the porch.

"That links him technically—tight," said McGregor, folding the letter with decisive finger strokes and stowing it into his pocket. "Where did he learn to write such English?"

"Oxford," said Ommony. "He took D.D. and LL.D. degrees, or so Marmaduke told me. We're not the only section of humanity that runs to Secret Service, Mac. We look for one thing and they for another. There isn't much they don't know about us along the line that interests them."

Mrs. Cornock-Campbell looked incredulous.

"A Ringding Gelong Lama—an English doctor of divinity? Wonders don't cease, do they! What could he gain by taking *that* degree? Amusement? Are they as subtle as all that?"

"Subtle, yes. Amusement, no," said Ommony, frowning darkly. "How spike the guns of the persistent missionary unless they know how the guns are loaded? That's the gist of one of his letters to me. But —— the man! Why couldn't he meet me by appointment instead of writing this stuff? I've suspected him for some time of——"

Mrs. Cornock-Campbell laughed.

"He evidently knows you, Cottswold, better than you know him."

"Know him? I've never met him!" Ommony retorted. "I saw him today for the first time, from behind a brass Buddha in Chutter Chand's shop. There've been lots of times when he ought to have met me to talk over details in connection with the trusteeship, but it all had to be done by correspondence. He has set his signature to every paper I drew up, and he has agreed to every proposal I have made. As far as I know he hasn't had much to say to Hannah Sanburn—and never argues with her—although he examines accounts and papers and never fails to visit the mission at least once a year. Confound him! Why is he afraid of me? Why couldn't he come in, instead of leaving that fool letter on the doorstep?"

"*Wise* letter!" Mrs. Cornock-Campbell went back to the piano. None but Rimsky-Korsakov could describe her sensations. "He evidently knows how to manage you. Do you ever bet, John? I will bet five rupees I know what's next!"

John McGregor drew a five-rupee note from his pocket and laid it on the piano. Mrs. Cornock-Campbell began playing. Dawa Tsering, his head to one side like a bird's watched her fingers, listening intently.

"There are devils inside the machine," he said after a while. "Give me my knife, Ommon*ee*, and let me go."

But Ommony, pacing the floor, both hands behind him, frowning, took no notice of any one. He was away off in a realm of conjecture of his own.

"Remember; I stand to lose five dibs," McGregor remarked at the end of five minutes. "Suppose you put me out of agony. I'm Scots, you know."

"——!" Ommony exclaimed. "Why can't he take me into his confidence? I hate to suspect a man. Pen and ink anywhere?"

"I lose," said Mrs. Cornock-Campbell, nodding toward a gilt-and-ivory writing desk against the wall. "Take back your five rupees, John. You'll find a five of mine being used as a book mark in one of those volumes of Walter Pater on the shelf. Put something in its place."

McGregor paid himself. Ommony at the desk tore up sheet after sheet of paper, chuckled at last and wrote a final draft.

"There, that should do. That's obscure enough. That hoists him with his own petard. Why don't women ever have clean blotting paper?"

He showed what he had written to McGregor, who read it aloud, Mrs. Cornock-Campbell playing very softly while she listened:

To the holy LAMA TSIANG SAMDUP,
In the place where he has chosen to secrete himself.
I will take the Middle Way if I can find it, and I hope neither of us may get lost. I wish you all success. COTTSWOLD OMMONY.

"Sarcasm?" said Mrs. Cornock-Campbell. "I wonder if that ever pays."

"We'll see!"

Ommony sealed up the envelope, on which he had written simply "Tsiang Samdup," and stood over Dawa Tsering.

"Take this letter to the lama. Come back here with proof you have delivered it, and you shall have your knife."

"Send him in my dogcart," McGregor advised. "My *sais* * is one of those rare birds who do as they're told. He don't talk or ask questions."

SO DAWA TSERING was seen on to the back seat of the dogcart with a horse-blanket under him to keep grease off the cushion, and the conference was resumed. McGregor questioned Ommony narrowly concerning the events of the afternoon and particularly as to the exact location of the courtyard where the attack had taken place.

"It doesn't look to me as if they meant to kill you," he said at last. "You're sure it was a boy's voice that warned you to scoot? Do you think the old lama would countenance murder? It seems to me they were bent on merely driving you away. Um-tiddley-um-tum-tum—we've made a mess of this—we *should* have had that building watched. Katherine, I will bet these ten rupees that our friend from Spiti draws blank."

"Men are unintuitive creatures," Mrs. Cornock-Campbell answered. "No, John, I won't bet. The obvious thing was to take the lama at his word and go straight to Tilgaun. I supposed Cottswold would see that, but he didn't—did you? What is the objection?"

"This," said Ommony, pausing, looking obstinate. "He is either my friend or he isn't. He has every reason to be frank with me. He has chosen the other line. All right."

"All wrong!" she answered, chuckling. "In that letter, in his own way, he invited you to trust him."

"I don't!" remarked Ommony, shutting his jaws with a snap that could be heard across the room.

He refused to explain himself. He was not quite sure he could have done that, but had no inclination to try. He was under one of those waves of indignation that submerge a man without announcing their own cause. If he had opened his lips it would have been to invite McGregor to throw a plain-clothes cordon around that house at the end of the courtyard, search the place and expose its secrets. In the mood he was in at the moment he could submit the lama to almost any indignity; and he did not doubt that if he should ask McGregor to set the secret nets in motion, it would only be a matter of an hour or so before the lama's every possible avenue of escape would be cut off.

---

* Coachman

Habitual self-control alone prevented that. Twenty years of living courteously in a conquered country, making full allowance for the feelings of those who must look to him for justice, had bred a restraint that ill temper could not overthrow. But he did not dare to let himself speak just then. He preferred to be rude—took up a book and began reading.

Mrs. Cornock-Campbell went on playing. John McGregor smoked in silence, pulling out the lama's letter, reading it over and over, trying to discover hidden meanings. So more than an hour went by with hardly a word spoken, and it was long after midnight when the wheels of McGregor's returning dogcart skidded on the loose gravel of the drive at the rear of the house and Diana awoke on the porch to tell the moon about it.

Dawa Tsering was admitted through the back door and shepherded in by the Goanese butler, who held his nose, but who was not otherwise so lacking in appreciation as to shut the door tight when he left the room. Ommony strode to the door, opened it wide, looked into the frightened eyes of the Goanese and watched him until he disappeared through a swing-door at the end of the passage.

"Now?" he said, shutting the door tight behind him.

"The lama is gone!" Dawa Tsering announced dramatically. "If I had had my knife I would have slain the impudent —— who gave me the news! Tripe out of the belly of a pig is his countenance! Eggs are his eyes! He is a *ragyaba!** The son of evil pretended not to know me! When I offered him the letter for the lama he growled that Tsiang Samdup and his *chela* had gone elsewhere. When I bade him let me in, that I might see for myself, he answered ignorantly."

"Ignorantly? How do you mean?"

"He struck me with a bucket—of which the contents were garbage, unsuitable to a man of my distinction. So I crowned him with the bucket—thus—not gently—and his head went through the bottom of the thing, so that, as it were, he wore a helmet full of smells and could no longer see. So then I smote him in the belly with my fist—thus—and with my foot—thus—as he fell. And then I came away. And there is the letter. Smell it. Behold the dirt on it, in proof I lie not. Now give me my knife, Ommon*ee*."

Ommony went into the hall and produced the "knife" from behind the hat rack. Dawa Tsering thumbed the edge of the blade lovingly before thrusting the weapon into its leather scabbard inside his shirt.

"Now I am a man again," he said devoutly. "They would better avoid me with their buckets full of filth!"

Ommony studied him in silence for a moment.

"Did you ever have a bath?" he asked curiously.

"Aye. Tsiang Samdup and his *chela* made me take one whenever they happened to think of it. That is how I know they are not especially holy. There is something heretical about them that I do not understand."

"I am worse than they," said Ommony.

"No doubt. They have their good points."

"I have none. You must wash yourself as often as I tell you; and I shall give the order oftener than they did. From now on you are my servant."

"But who says so?"

"I do."

"You desire me?"

"No, because I already have you. I can dispose of you as I see fit," said Ommony. "I can send you to the jail for killings and for train robberies and for trying to murder me this afternoon. Or I can bid you work out the score in other ways."

"That is true, more or less. Yes, there is something in what you say, Ommon*ee*."

"It is not more or less true. It is quite true."

"How so? Have I not my knife? Would you like to fight me? I can slay that she dog of thine as easily as I can lay thy bowels on the floor."

**Ragyabas* are the lowest dregs of Tibetan society who live on the outskirts of towns and dispose of the dead. When used, as in this case, as an adjective the word has significance too horrible to be translated. The man was, of course, not a *ragyaba*.

"No," said Ommony, "no honorable man could do that to his master. Are you not an honorable man?"

"None more so!"

"And I am your master, so that settles it."

Dawa Tsering looked puzzled; there was something in the reasoning that escaped him. But it is what men do not understand that binds them to others' chariot wheels.

"Well—I do not wish to return to Spiti—yet," he said reflectively. "But about the bath—how often? Besides, it is contrary to my religion, now I come to think of it."

"Change your religion, then. Now—no more argument. Which way has the lama gone?"

"Oh, as to that—I suppose I could discover that. How much will you pay me?"

"Thirty rupees a month, clean clothing, two blankets and your food."

"That is almost no pay at all," said Dawa Tsering. "To make a profit at that rate, I should have to eat so much that my belly would be at risk of bursting. There is discomfort in so much eating."

"They would give you enough to eat and no more, without money, in the jail," said Ommony, "and you would have to obey a babu, and be shaved by a contractor, and make mats without reward. And if you were very well behaved, they would let you rake the head *jemadar's* garden.

"Moreover, Tin Lal, who is also in the jail, would mock you at no risk to himself, since you would have no knife; and because he is clever and malignant he would constantly get you into trouble, laughing when you were punished. And since he is only in the jail for a short time and you would be in for a long time, there would be no remedy. However, suit yourself."

"You are a hard man, Ommon*ee!*"

"I am. I have warned you."

"Oh, well; I suppose it is better so. A soft knife is quickly dulled, and men are the same way. Yielding men are not dependable. Pay me a month's wages in advance, and tomorrow we will buy the blankets."

But beginnings are beginnings. A foundation not well laid destroys the whole edifice.

"From now until I set you free, *your* desires are nothing," Ommony said sternly. "You consider *my* needs and *my* convenience. When I have time to consider yours, it will remain to be seen whether I forget or not. Go and wait on the porch. Try to make friends with the dog; she can teach you a lot you must learn in one way or another. If the dog permits you leisure for thought try to imagine which way the lama may have gone."

Dawa Tsering went out through the hall, too impressed by the novelty of the situation even to mutter to himself. Ommony went to the window and said two or three words to Diana, whose long tail beat responsively on the teak boards. Presently came the sound of Dawa Tsering's voice:

"O thou! My time has not come to be eaten.* Have wisdom!"

A low, rumbling growl announced that Diana was considering the situation, keeping Ommony's command in mind.

"I have no doubt thou art a very evil devil!"

Again the growl, followed by a thump and the shuffling sound of Dawa Tsering squatting himself on the porch.

"So—thus. We will see whether Ommon*ee* knows what he is doing. Attack me and die, thou mother of fangs and thunder! Then I will know it is not my karma to obey this Ommon*ee*. Lie still, thou earthquake, and I will ——"

THIS voice dropped to a murmur and died away. Thoughts too obscure for expression seemed to have riveted his whole attention. Ommony, peering through the shutter-slats, could see him sitting almost within arm's reach of the dog, staring straight in front of him at the stars on the north horizon. He turned to Mrs. Cornock-Campbell:

"And now I'll go away and let you sleep. When we come to your house Mac and I invariably forget manners and stay into the wee small hours ——"

But at a sign from her he sat down again. She closed the piano and locked it. "Cottswold," she said, "tell me what you have in mind. You have said too much or too little."

"I have told all I know—that is, that I care to tell—even to you," Ommony answered. "I suppose, as a matter of fact, I'm a bit piqued. That lama has had scores of opportunities to realize that I wouldn't betray confidences. I am told I'm notorious for refusing to tell the Government what I know about individuals; and the lama is perfectly aware of that. I've risked my job fifty times by insisting on holding my tongue. Am I right, Mac?"

---

* Referring to the Tibetan custom of throwing out the dead to be devoured by dogs.

"You are!" McGregor answered with a dry smile. "I remember, I once considered it my duty to advise threatening you with drastic penalties. I would have ordered you tortured, but for the circumstance that that means of inducement is out of date. And besides, I had ma doots of its efficacy in your instance."

Ommony grinned. He preferred that praise to all the orders in the almanac.

"So, —— the lama!" he went on fervently. "He has kept aloof for twenty years. I'm satisfied there's something he's deliberately keeping from me. I've no notion what it is, but that piece of jade is probably connected with it. I'm going to track him—tempt him—force his hand."

"Are you sure you've no notion what he's keeping from you?" Mrs. Cornock-Campbell asked; and Ommony stared hard at her, while McGregor blew smoke at the ceiling.

"Perhaps I have a sort of notion—yes," he answered slowly. "Sometimes I suspect he knows what took Jack Terry and my sister to the Abor country."

"And?"

Mrs. Cornock-Campbell studied him with dark-blue eyes that seemed to search for something lacking in his mental make-up.

"He *may* know what became of them."

Mrs. Cornock-Campbell smiled and sighed. "Well—we three will meet again before you go, I suppose?"

"No," said Ommony. "I expect to be gone before daybreak. I'll write when I get the chance. If we don't meet again this side of Yama's Bar* ——"

"Oh, nonsense."

"Nevertheless—in case. Your friendship has been one of five things that have made my life in India worth while.

"I'm glad I've helped," she answered. "It's a privilege to have friends like you and John McGregor, who don't imagine they're in love when you share their confidences! Good night. I don't believe you're going to your doom. I think I'd know it if you were."

"Doom? There isn't any doom. There's only a reshuffling of the cards." said Ommony. "Good night."

CHAPTER VIII

THE MIDDLE WAY

We live in the eternal Now, and it is Now that we create our destiny. It follows, that to grieve over the past is useless and to make plans for the future is a waste of time. There is only one ambition that is good, and that is: so to live Now that none may weary of life's emptiness and none may have to do the task we leave undone.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

NO MAN can learn any more of India in twenty years, or in any length of time, than he can learn about himself; and that is a mystery, but it is the door to understanding. And that is why men like Ommony and John McGregor, who have given to India the whole of their active lives, will say in good faith that they know very little about the country. It is also why they are guarded in their praise of Viceroys and candidly suspicious of all politicians; why they listen to the missionary with emotion not entirely disconnected from cold anger; and why, when they return to England in late life, ripened by experience, they do not become leaders of men.

The truth is that in studying India they have learned a great deal about themselves —although, of course, many men come back from the East with eyes still shut and ears wide open to the fashionable catch-words. Honest men, knowing how easily and how often they have deceived others unintentionally and themselves have been deceived, do not dare to pose as prophets.

However there are naturally some things that they do know, guide-books, Government reports and "experts" notwithstanding.

They know, some of them, that news travels up and down India without the aid of wire, semaphore or radio, and faster than any mechanical means yet invented can imitate. It seems to travel almost with the speed of thought, but although it gets noised abroad none will ever tell which individual released it.*

They also know that there are routes of travel, unconnected with the railways lines or trunk roads, not marked by recognizable signposts and obscure to all who have not the key to them. Some of these routes are suspected to be religious in their origin and purpose; some are political—and those are better understood. Some, they say, are survivals of forgotten periods of history when conquered people had to devise means of communication that could be kept absolutely secret from the conqueror.

---

*Yama (pronounced Yum) is the name of the god, in the Hindu pantheon, who judges the souls of the dead.

*There is the notorious instance of the news of Lord Roberts' relief of Kandahar reaching Bombay long before the Government in Simla knew the facts. See "Forty Years in India," by Lord Roberts.

At any rate the routes are there, and are innumerable, crossing one another like lines on the palm of a man's hand. A man with the proper credentials—and whatever those are, they are neither written nor carried on the person—can travel from end to end of India, not often at high speed, but always secretly; and the strange part is, that he may cross a hundred other routes as unknown to himself as the one he travels by is secret from other people.

The routes are opened, closed and changed mysteriously. The men who use them seldom seem to know their exact detail in advance, and the fact that a man has traveled once by one of them—or even a dozen times—is no proof that he can return the same way. The underground route by which runaway slaves were smuggled from South to North before the Civil War in the United States is a crude and merely suggestive illustration of how the system works; and one thing is certain: These so-to-speak "underground" communications have nothing whatever to do with the ordinary pilgrim routes, although they may cross them at a thousand points. McGregor and Ommony were near the starting point of one of them, although McGregor did not know *how* near. Ommony had an inkling, but kept his own counsel.

"Hotel, I suppose?" said McGregor, tooling the dogcart along at a slow trot through the deserted streets.

They were deserted, that is, of apparent life, but there are always scores of eyes alert in India.

"No. Set me down in the Chandni Chowk. I'll tell you where to stop."

"Man alive, you can't go scouting in a dinner jacket!"

"Why not?" Ommony asked obstinately.

McGregor did not answer. Ommony spoke his mind in jerky sentences.

"Tomorrow morning—*this* morning, I mean—be a good chap—pack my things at the hotel—forward them all to Tilgaun. Send some one you can trust. Let him leave them with Miss Sanburn—bring back a receipt to you."

"Money?" asked McGregor, nodding.

"Plenty. If I need more I'll cash drafts on Chutter Chand."

"What name will you sign on them? I'd better warn him, hadn't I?"

"No need. I'll make a mark on the drafts that he'll recognize."

"Going to take the dog with you?"

"Of course."

McGregor smiled to himself. Ommony noticed it.

"By the way, Mac, don't try to keep track of me."

"Um-m-m!" remarked McGregor.

Ommony's jaw came forward.

"I *might* not know, but *they* would, Mac. You can't keep a thing like that from them. They'd close the Middle Way against me."

McGregor whistled softly. The Middle Way to Nirvana* is no particular secret; any one may read of it in any of a thousand books, and he may tread that Path who dares to declare war on desire. But that is esoteric, and no concern of the Secret Service. Exoterically speaking, "the Middle Way" is a trail that for more than a century the Secret Service has desired to learn with all its inquisitive heart.

"I mean it, Mac. All bets are off unless you promise."

"You needn't betray confidences," said McGregor. "You're not responsible, if I keep tabs on you."

"That's a naked lie, and you know it, Mac! I can get through if I burn all bridges. I haven't learned what little I do know by letting *you* know what I was doing. You know that."

"Um-m-m! If you're killed—or disappear?"

"That's my lookout."

"As a friend you're all right. As an assistant you're a disappointing, independent ——!" said McGregor. "You're as useful as a bellyache to open a can of corned beef with! All right. —— it. Have your own way. Remember, I shall take you at your word. If you're ditched, there's no ambulance."

---

*Nirvana. The ultimate object of attainment for the Buddhist. The word has been translated "nothingness," and the non-Buddhist missionaries are responsible for the commonly accepted and totally false belief that it means "extinction." The truth is that by Nirvana the Buddhist means a condition which it is utterly impossible for the human mind to comprehend, but which can be attained, after thousands of reincarnations, by strict adherence to the Golden Rule—that is, by deeds and abstaining from deeds, not by words and self-indulgence. It is said that the understanding of what is meant by Nirvana will dawn gradually on the mind of him who is tolerant and strives unselfishly.

"Splendid. Then here's where I vanish —pull up by that lamp post, won't you? Well—so long, old chap. Nothing personal—eh, Mac?"

"No, —— you! Nothing personal. I wish I were coming with you. Good luck. Good-by, old chap."

They did not shake hands, for that might have implied that there was a dwindling friendship, to be bridged or denied recognition. Diana sprang down from behind, and Dawa Tsering followed her. McGregor drove away, not looking back, and the *sais* —the sole occupant now of the back seat—sat with folded arms, staring straight along the middle of the street. But Ommony took no chances with the *sais;* he watched until the dogcart turned a corner before he made a move of any kind.

HE WAS no such simpleton as to suppose he was not watched. Whoever had brought the lama's letter to Mrs. Cornock-Campbell's house could easily have tracked the dogcart's course across the city. Delhi is even better supplied than London with short cuts, narrow lanes and passages that make it easy for a man on foot to "shadow" anything on wheels without running the least risk of detection.

Ommony did not even try to avoid observation, but walked straight to a door between two shop-fronts and pounded on it. He had to wait about three minutes before the door was opened—gingerly at first, then after a moment's inspection suddenly and wide.

A very sleepy-looking Jew confronted him—a Jew of the long-nosed type, with the earlock that betokened orthodoxy. He had a straggly beard, which he stroked with not exactly nervous but exceedingly alert, long fingers.

"Ommony! This time of night?" he said in perfectly good English; but there was nothing that even resembled English about his make-up.

He wore a turban of embroidered silk and a Kashmir shawl thrown over a cotton shirt and baggy pantaloons. His bare feet showed through the straps of sandals.

"Let me in, Benjamin."

The Jew nodded and, holding a lantern high, led the way down a passage beside a staircase into a big room at the rear that was piled with heaps of clothing—costumes of every kind and color, some new, some second hand, some worthy to be reckoned antiques. There were shelves stacked with cosmetics and aromatic scents. There were saddles, saddle-cloths and blankets, tents and camp-equipment; yak-hair shirts from over the Pamis; prayer mats from Samarkhand; second-hand dress suits from London; silk-hats, "bowlers," turbans; ancient swords and pistols; matchlocks adorned with brass and turquoise and notched in the butt suggestively. And there was a smell of all the ends of Asia that Diana sniffed and deciphered as a Sanskrit scholar reads old manuscripts.

"I will have tea brought," said Benjamin, setting down the lantern and shuffling away in the dark toward the stairs.

The impression was that he wanted time to think before indulging in any conversation.

Ommony sat down on a heap of blankets and beckoned Dawa Tsering to come closer to the light.

"Now you know where to find me," he said abruptly. "When the Jew returns he shall let you out by the back door. Find your way to that house in the courtyard. Tell those Tibetans that unless that letter—you still have it?—is delivered to the lama, *he shall never get that for which he came to Delhi.* Do you understand?"

"Do you take me for a fool, Ommon*ee?* You mean, if he receives this letter then he shall have the green stone? But that is the talk of a crazy man. Tell him he must *buy* the green stone, and then let me do the bargaining!"

Ommony betrayed no more impatience than he used to when he was teaching the puppy Diana the rudiments of her education.

"I see I have no use for you after all," he said, looking bored.

"Huh! A blind man could see better than that. It is as clear as this lanternlight that you and I are destined to be useful to each other. Nay, Ommon*ee,* I will not go away!— What is that? I am not worth paying? Is *that* so! Very well, I will stay and serve for nothing!— Do you hear me, Ommon*ee?*— Huh! Those are the words of a great one—of a bold one—but it is nothing to me that you will not have me thrown into prison if I get hence—I say I will *not* go away!— You will not answer, eh?— Very well, I will go with the letter and that message. *Then* we will see! One of these days you will tell me I was right. Where is that Jew *bunnia?*"*

Benjamin came shuffling back along the passage, looking like an elongated specter as he stood in the door with the dark behind him. Dawa Tsering swaggered up to him demanding to be let out, and from behind the Hillman's back Ommony made a signal indicating the back door. Benjamin, very wide awake now and taking in everything with glittering black eyes, picked up the lantern and, leaving Ommony in the dark, led the way into another large room at the rear, out of which a door opened into an alley.

"That one not only has a stink, he has a devil! Beware of him, Ommony!" he said, returning and sitting down on the blanket pile, making no bones about it, not waiting for an invitation. He and Ommony were evidently old friends.

"My daughter will bring for us tea in a minute. Hey-hey! We have all grown older since you hid us in that forest of yours —where the ghosts are, Ommony, and the wolves and the tigers! Gr-r-r-agh! What a time that was! Our own people lifting hands against us! None but you believing us innocent! Tch-tch-tch! That cave was a place of terrors, but your heart was good. I left my middle age in that cave, Ommony. Since fifteen years ago I am an old man!"

The daughter came, carrying another lantern and a brass Benares tray—a large-eyed woman with black hair, plump and on the wrong side of forty, dressed in the Hindu fashion, her big breasts bulging under a yellow silk shawl. She made as much fuss over Ommony as if he were a long-lost husband but embarrassed him hardly at all, because she did not use English and the eastern words sounded less absurd than flattery does in any western tongue.

"The son-in-law? Aha!" said Benjamin. "Mordecai does well. He is in Bokhara just now; but that is a secret. He buys Bokhara pieces from the Jews who became poor on account of the Bolshevism. Tay-yay! It is a long way to Bokhara and no protection nowadays. We win or lose a fortune, Ommony!"

The daughter poured tea into China cups that had once been a raja's, and the three drank together as if it were a sacred rite, touching cups and murmuring words that are not in any dictionary. Then the daughter went away, and Ommony, leaning back against the wall with Diana's great head on his lap, discussed things with Benjamin that would have made McGregor's ears burn if he had had an inkling of them.

"Yes, Ommony, yes. I know which way the lama travels. How do I know—eh? How was it *you* knew that a she bear had a young one with her? Because she ground her teeth—wasn't that so? Well, I didn't know that, but I know a little about the lama. Let me think. There is danger, Ommony, but—but—" Benjamin's eyes shone, and his fingers worked nervously as if they were kneading something concrete out of unseen ingredients—"You love danger as I love my daughter! You remember the time when you secured the costume business for me in the Panch Mahal in Pegu—when the raja married and spent a fortune in a week?"

Ommony nodded. Together he and Benjamin had done things that are not included in the lives of routine-loving mortals —things that are forbidden—things that the orthodox authorities declare are not so. And there is mirth in memories of that kind, more than in all the comedies at which one pays legitimately to look on. Benjamin cackled and stroked his beard reminiscently.

"Did the raja ever learn that you and I were actors in that play? Heh-heh-heh! Did the priests ever discover it? Teh-heh-heh-heh! Or my people! Eh-heh! You remember how the nautch girls were inquisitive? Ommony, you had the key to the temple crypts in your hand that minute! What actresses they were! What incomparable artists! And what children! The half of them were in love with you, and the other half were so devoured by curiosity—akh, how they wriggled with it!—they would have betrayed the chief priest at a nod from you! And didn't they dislike me!

"I haven't your gift, Ommony, for getting into the hearts; I can only see behind the brains. And what I see— But never mind. What times! What times! Did you never follow that up? Did you penetrate the crypt? Did you now?"

"No time. Had to get back to work."

"Ah, well—you wouldn't tell *me*, I suppose. But why not once more be an actor? Ommony, you know *all* the Hindu plays. I have seen you act Pururavas and —well—believe me—I sat and pinched myself—I am telling you the truth!—and even so— But listen: The Lama Tsiang Samdup is planning to take a company of actors north for certain reasons!"

---

*Merchant.

It would have been hard for any one who did not know him intimately to believe that Ommony, as he sat there against the wall in an ultra-conservative English dinner jacket, could act any part except that of an unimaginative Englishman. There was not one trace of oriental character about him, nor a hint of artistry. The only suggestion that he might be capable of more than met the eye was Benjamin's manifest affection—admiration—half familiar, half obsequious respect.

"I'm ready for anything," he said in a matter-of-fact voice. "The question is——"

"Do you dare? That is the question. Hah! You have the courage of a Jew! Dare you act *all* parts, Ommony? Oh—oh, but the risk is— Listen! There is a troupe of actors——"

Benjamin's long fingers began to knead the air excitedly; but Ommony sat still, staring straight before him, frowning a little—aware that Benjamin was itching to divulge a confidence.

"Their director, Ommony, is a man named Maitraya. His best male actor died. He will have to act the leading rôles himself unless——"

"I don't see the advantage," Ommony objected.

But he did—he saw it instantly.

"Listen, Ommony! No bargain is a good one unless all concerned in it are gainers! Maitraya owes me money. He can not pay. He is honest. He would pay me if he could. I hold his *hundis*.* I could ruin him. He *must* do as I say!

"Now listen! Listen! There would be a solution of his difficulties, and—I might even be willing to advance just a little more money for his needs. He would not need much—just a little. And he must do as I say—you understand? He must take you if I say so. The lama commissioned *me* to engage the actors."

"But won't he want to know all about the actors?" Ommony asked guardedly.

He knew better than to turn down Benjamin's proposals point blank.

Benjamin grew suddenly calm, shot one keen glance at Ommony and changed his weapon, so to speak, into the other hand. It began to be clear enough that Benjamin had irons of his own to heat.

"Of course, if you ask *me*, Ommony—if you were to ask *my* advice—as a man to a man of business—I would ask you, why not go straight to Tilgaun and there wait for the lama? He is searching, you say, for a piece of jade which is in your possession? Will he not follow you to Tilgaun if you go straight there? How much trouble you would save! How much risk you would avoid!"

"And how much information I might lose!" said Ommony.

"Show me the jade, Ommony."

"Can't. I've sent it to Tilgaun. The lama doesn't know that. He thinks I've got it with me."

"Well? Then if you go to Tilgaun won't he follow you?"

"Undoubtedly. But I prefer to follow *him*. It's this way: You and I, Benjamin, have been friends for fifteen years, haven't we? If you have anything you want to keep from me—I don't doubt there are lots of things—you tell me point blank, and I'm careful to shut my eyes and ears. If I stumble on anything by accident, I dismiss it from mind; I forget it. If you tell me a secret in confidence, I keep it a secret—take no advantage of you. I know you treat me in the same way.

"But the lama is supposed to have been my friend for *twenty* years, although I've never met him to speak to—never saw him until yesterday. He has always managed *not* to meet me, without ever giving any reason for it; and he has conveyed the impression that he is keeping some great secret from me, without having the courtesy to ask me to restrain natural curiosity.

"Now comes this piece of jade, with all sorts of mysterious side issues. He traces it into my hands. Instead of asking me for it and asking me, as one friend to another, not to follow up the mystery, he spies on me—deliberately counts on my honesty and courtesy—and keeps out of sight. He plans to meet me at Tilgaun, where his arm might be lots longer than mine. I used to consider him a wise old saint, but lately he has made me suspect him of deep mischief. His spying on me is an open invitation to me to spy on *him*. I propose to find out all I can about him. If he has been using me as a stalking horse all these years——"

---

* Promissory notes.

"You could begin at Tilgaun, Ommony, just as easily as here," said Benjamin, stroking his beard.

His eyes were glittering eagerly, but friendship apparently imposed the obligation to find fault with a plan if possible before helping to carry it out.

"No. He *wants* me to go straight to Tilgaun. I don't propose to play into his hands. The place to begin to unravel a mystery is at one or the other end of it."

"He may have traced you to my place, Ommony. If you should go with Maitraya the lama will know it. If he thinks you have the stone in your possession, he will——"

"—probably try to steal the stone. I'm hoping he will exhaust his ingenuity. I can create a mystery on my own account; he'll be puzzled. He won't dare to have me murdered until he knows for certain where the stone is. For fear of losing track of it altogether, he'll have to do everything possible to preserve my life and to save me from exposure."

"If he is clever *he* will go straight to Tilgaun!" said Benjamin. "That is what I would do in his place. Then *you* would have to follow *him*."

"If he does that, well and good. But if my guess is right, he has a whole network of intrigue to attend to. He proposed to have me cool my heels in Tilgaun while he attended to business on the way."

BENJAMIN began to pace the floor between the heaps of assorted clothing. He seemed to be torn between personal interest and a desire to give Ommony the soundest possible advice. He muttered to himself. His arms moved as if he were arguing. Once he stood still with his back toward Ommony and bit his nails. Then he walked the floor again three or four times, almost stopping each time he passed Ommony. At last he stood still in front of him.

"If I tell you—things that I should not tell—what will you think of me?" he asked.

Ommony laughed abruptly.

"Suppose I tell you first what I think you have in mind!" he said. "You old simpleton! Why do you suppose I came straight to you at this hour of the night?"

He glanced up at the wall behind him.

"You didn't get that devil mask in Delhi! It's hanging there to inform some sort of Tibetans that they've come to the right place. I've known for more than nine years that you're the business agent for a monastery in the Abor country. However, it's your secret—you don't have to tell me a thing you don't want to."

Benjamin stared at him—a rather scandalized, a rather astonished, a rather sly old Benjamin, with his turban a little to one side and his lower lip drooping. There was a hint of terror in his eyes.

"How much else do you know? You? Ommony!" he demanded.

"Nothing. That is—no more than a blind man who knew you intimately couldn't help knowing. Shut up, if you want to. I don't pry into my friends' affairs, and you're not like the lama. You've kept nothing from me I was entitled to know."

"Not—not like the lama! Ommony—if *you* knew!"

Benjamin began mumbling to himself in Spanish, but there were Hebrew words interspersed with it. Ommony, knowing no Hebrew or Spanish, let him mumble on, frowning as if busy with his own thoughts. There was still an hour before dawn, when the stirring of a thousand other thoughts would inevitably break the chain of this one—plenty of time for Benjamin to outpour confidences—nothing to be gained by urging him.

"Tsiang Samdup the lama is good—he is better than both of us!" Benjamin said at last emphatically. He seemed to be trying to convince himself. "God forbid that I should play a trick on him! But—but——"

Not a word from Ommony. To all appearance he was brown-studying over something else, twisting Diana's ear, staring into the shadows beyond the lantern, so intent on his own thoughts that he did not move when a rat scurried over his feet. Benjamin burst into speech suddenly:

"Fifteen—nearly sixteen years, Ommony, I have been agent for the Lama Tsiang Samdup! You would never believe the things he buys! Not ordinary things! And he pays with bullion—gold bars! Wait—I show you!"

He unlocked a safe in the corner of the store and produced three small bars of solid gold, giving them to Ommony to weigh in the palm of his hand. But there was no mark on them; nothing to identify their place of origin.

"I have had dozens like those from him—dozens!"

But Ommony could not be tempted to ask questions; he knew Benjamin too well—suspected that Benjamin was too shrewd an old philosopher to engage in nefarious trade; also that he was itching to divulge a confidence. If you scratch a man who itches, impulse ceases. Besides, he was perfectly sincere in not wanting to pry into Benjamin's private affairs. To listen to them was another matter.

Benjamin came and sat down on the pile of blankets—laid a hand on Ommony's shoulder—thrust his chin forward, and screwed his eyes up.

"If he should know I told——"

"He'll never learn from me."

"Girls! Nice—little—young ones!"

Ommony looked startled—stung. There was the glare in his eyes of a man who has been scurvily insulted.

"Little European girls! Little orphans! Seven! Eh, Ommony? Now what do you think? And all the supplies for them—constantly—books—little garments. Ah! But they grow, those young ones! Stockings! Shoes! Now, what do you think of that?"

"Are you lying?" Ommony asked in a flat voice.

"*Would* I lie to *you! Would* I tell it to any other man? First to get the girls—and such a business! Healthy they must be, and well born—that is, nicely born. And the first was a little Jewess, eight years old at that time, from parents who were killed in Stamboul.

"That was not so very difficult; a Jew and his wife whom I knew intimately brought her as their own child to Bombay; and after that it was easy to dress her as a Hindu child and to pretend she was a little young widow, and to smuggle her northward stage by stage. And once she reached Delhi there was the Middle Way, Ommony; the Middle Way! Hah! It was not so difficult. And the profit was very good."

"I'm waiting for you to hedge," said Ommony. "So far, I simply don't believe you."

"Well; the next was eleven years old, and she made trouble. She was the child of a sea captain who was hanged for shooting drunken sailors. Some missionaries took care of her; but they said things about her father, and she ran away—from Poona—the mission was in Poona. So of course there was search, and much in the newspapers. We had to hide her carefully.

"The missionaries offered a reward, but she did not want to go back to the missionaries. In many ways her character was such as Tsiang Samdup wished. And in the end we conveyed her by bullock *gharri* all the way from Bombay to Ahmedabad, where we kept her several months in the home of a Hindu midwife. Then the Middle Way. The Middle Way is easy when you know it.

"The third was from Bangalore—and she was only nine months old—no trouble at all—the daughter of a very pretty lady who was engaged to be married—but the man died. She gave the baby to my wife's sister. That child went north in the arms of a Tibetan woman from Darjiling.

"And the fourth was from London—a Russian musician's daughter. And the fifth was from Glasgow. And the sixth from Sweden, or so it was said. Those three were all about the same age—six or seven or thereabouts.

"The seventh—she was nine years old, and the best of them all—was from New York—born in New York—or at sea, I forget which. Her father, an Irishman, died and the mother, who was English, went to visit her people in England. But the people had died too.

"So she went back to America, and there was some difficulty in connection with the immigration laws. She was not allowed to land. She had to return to England, where there was destitution and I know not what followed after that, though it is easy to imagine things. The mother was dying, and I was told she wished above all things to save the child from being put in an institution. Some people who are well known to me offered to care for the child.

"It happened I was in London, Ommony. I went and saw the mother; and, since she was dying, I took a chance and told her certain things; and perhaps because she was dying and therefore could understand and see around the corner, as it were, she agreed. We had conversed, as you might say, heart to heart.

"It was I who brought that child to India. I had to adopt her legally, and—oh, Ommony, if I could have kept her! She was like my little own daughter to me! But what was there that *I* could do for her—an old Jew, here in Delhi? Money, yes; but nothing else, and money is nothing. It broke my heart. She went northward by the Middle Way—you know what I mean by the Middle Way?"

Ommony's expression was stone cold; he was speechless. He eyed Benjamin with a hard stare that had reached the rock bottom of revelation and disgust. He did not dare to speak. Having pledged his word in advance not to betray Benjamin's secrets, his word was good; there was no hesitation on that score. A deliberate promise, in his estimation, stood above all obligations, whatever the consequences to himself. But he felt that sickening sensation of having trusted a man who might turn out to have been rotten after all.

He did not dare to say a word that might give Benjamin an inkling of his real feelings. He must use the man as an ally. In a way he was indebted to him—for information as to the lama's real activities. No wonder the lama had kept so carefully aloof!

Ommony forced himself to smile—battling with the horror of the thought of being co-trustee with a Tibetan, who with his right hand helped to run a philanthropic mission and with his left imported European girls—for what purpose the Powers of Evil only knew. There are other purposes than crude vice for which children may be stolen. His own sister——

"You say Tsiang Samdup is better than both of us?" he remarked at last, surprized at the evenness of his own voice.

"*Much* better!" said Benjamin. "Ah, Ommony—I see your face. Old I am. Blind I am not. But listen; have you seen what happens to the children whose parents die or desert them? Not the children of the poor; the little girls who are well born, who feel things that other children do not feel. I am a Jew—I know what feeling is! Hah! I have seen animals in cages who were happier!

"And what is happiness? Provision of necessities? Bah! They provide necessities for men in jail—and will you search in the jails to find happiness? I will show you thousands who have all they want, and nothing that they need! You understand me? Tsiang Samdup——"

"Never mind," said Ommony. "I'll find out for myself."

He did not want to talk; he was afraid of what he might hear—still more of what he might say. There are some men who present an impassive face toward the world, who can face death grinning and are not afraid of "the terror that moveth by night" or "the pestilence that stalketh at noonday," who would rather be crucified than reveal the horror they have for a certain sort of traffic. They prefer plain vice to hypnotism and the subtler sorts of spiritual slavery. Their emotion, too sacred or too profane to be discussed, is nameless—indescribable—only to be borne with set teeth.

"Ah! I know!" said Benjamin. "I know you, Ommony! What I have said is secret; therefore you don't wish to hear any more because you are too much a man to violate what is told in confidence. And you have made no promise to the lama. Am I right?"

Ommony nodded—grimly. That was the one bright point of light.

"I could tell—I could tell much," Benjamin went on. "But I saw you shut your mind against me. As well pour oil on fire to put it out as talk to a man who mistrusts! Very well. We have been friends, you and I. Remember that, Ommony.

"And now this: You believe in a devil—some kind of a devil—all Englishmen do. You believe I am a devil—Benjamin, your friend, whom you hid in a cave in your forest—me and my wife and my daughter. We are devils. Very well. A promise that is made to the devil has not to be kept, Ommony!

"Go and see for yourself. I will help you. When you have seen, you shall judge. Then, after that, if you say I am a devil, you shall break your faith with me. You shall denounce me *then*. I will let you be the judge."

"Have you ever been into the Abor country?" Ommony asked.

His voice was sullen now. There was a leaden note in it.

"No," Benjamin answered.

"And those—those children went to the Abor country?"

"Yes."

"Then what proof have you of what the lama has done with them?"

"Ommony—as God is my witness—I have none! I think—I—I am almost positively sure—but——"

He paced the floor twice and then flung

himself down on the blankets beside Ommony, looking up into his face. He was afraid at that moment if ever man was.

"That is why I have told you! I swore never to tell! Find out, Ommony! Tell the truth to *me* before I die! I am an old man, Ommony. If I have been a devil, I will eat—eat—eat the shame to the last crumb! Ommony, I swear—by my fathers I swear, I believe—I am almost positively sure——"

He buried his face in his hands, and there was silence, in which Ommony could hear Diana's quiet breathing and his own heart beats, and the ticking of the watch in his vest pocket.

CHAPTER IX

"GUPTA RAO"

When the actor, having thrown aside the costume and the wig, departs—is he a villain? Shall we take stones and murder him because for our amusement he enacted villainy?

If he should act death in the play because decency demands that, do we burn his body afterward and curse his memory? And is his wife a widow?

And is life not like the play? The gods who watch the drama know that somebody must play the villain's part, and somebody the pauper's. They reward men for the acting. He who acts a poor part well receives for his reward a more important part when his turn shall come to be born again into the world.

He therefore who is wise plays pauper, king or villain with the gods in mind.—From the Maxims of Tsiang Samdup.

DAWN came and no Dawa Tsering. Pale light through cobwebbed windows drove the dark into corners and consumed it, until the devil mask on the wall over Ommony's head grinned like a living thing and the street noises began, announcing that Delhi was awake. Diana stirred and sniffed, mistrusting her surroundings, but patient so long as Ommony was satisfied to be there.

Benjamin shuffled away to the stairs. The daughter came, fussily, fatly hospitable, with *chota hazri** on the brass Benares tray—fruit, tea, biscuits and a smile that would have won the confidence of Pharaoh, ruler of the Nile.

But Ommony's heart had turned harder than Pharaoh's ever did. He could hardly force himself to be civil. He drank the tea and ate the fruit because he needed it, unconscious now of any ritual of friendship in the act, answering polite inquiries with blunt monosyllables, his mind and memory working furiously, independently of any efforts at conversation. His face was a mask, and a dull one at that, with no smile on it. The iron in him had absolute charge.

He was not by any means the sort of man who flatters himself. But he had deliberately striven, from the day when he first set foot in India, so to govern himself as an individual that whatever he might touch should be improved and that no act or word of his should justify regret. Stern purpose that; and a result of it was staggering self-accusation now.

"You ——, deluded fool!" he muttered pitilessly, and Diana opened one eye wide, awaiting action.

But he sat still. He felt like a man on the edge of a precipice who must absolutely regain self-control before attempting to reach—not safety; he did not care a rap for safety—before attempting to rescue others.

That was it. He told himself—and that, of course, was untrue—that he cared nothing for his own reputation. He blamed himself, as mercilessly as he always had been merciful to others, for having acted as the Lama Tsiang Samdup's foil for twenty years. Above all things he despised a smug fool, and he called himself just that. He should have suspected the lama long ago. He should have seen through Benjamin.

He had believed his trusteeship of the Tilgaun mission was a clean and selfless contribution to the world's need. Why hadn't he resigned then from his Government job long ago to devote his whole career to the trust he had undertaken? If he had done that, he knew no lama could have hoodwinked him. No little girls would have been smuggled then into the unknown by way of Tilgaum.

The self-accusation case-hardened him. He set his teeth and almost physically reached out for the weapons of alertness, patience, persistence, cunning, with which he might redeem the situation. For redeem it he surely would, or else perish in the attempt. Exposure too soon would do no good. He needed full proof.

And he cared less to punish offenders than to rescue the children who had been carried off, and to make anything of the sort impossible in future, wondering, as he considered that, what any one would be able to do for girls in their predicament. The early years are the most impressionable;

---

*Early breakfast.

their characters would have been undermined.

And then a worse thought: Was Benjamin the only agent? There might be a regular market for European girls in that unknown corner of the earth, with secret agents supplying it from a dozen sources. If so, he felt and accepted his full share of responsibility. Who else could share it with him? Only Hannah Sanburn. She too had shielded the lama and, if ignorant of what was going on, might at least have suspected.

And thoughts of Hannah Sanburn did not give comfort. He remembered now a dozen incidents that should have made him suspect *her* years ago. That look in her eyes, for instance, and her nervousness whenever he had urged her to bring about a meeting between the lama and himself. He recalled now how carefully she had always shepherded him through the mission under pretext of observing the proprieties; she had never given him a chance to talk alone with any of the mission girls, and like a fool he had believed she did that to prevent the very suggestion of scandal from finding an excuse. He had admired her for it. But there was that room—or was it two rooms—near her own quarters that she had always kept locked, and that he had not cared to ask to inspect, because she said she kept her personal belongings in there.

And now this story told by Mrs. Cornock-Campbell, a witness as trustworthy as daybreak, of a white girl named Elsa, who spoke English and Tibetan, who had been to Lhassa, and who could draw—for he had seen the drawings—as masterfully as Michael Angelo. And Hannah Sanburn's plea for secrecy. And the fact that McGregor had had suspicions.

Marmaduke might not have been the father of this strange girl, but that did not preclude the possibility of Hannah Sanburn being the mother. It seemed likely —more than likely—that the lama possessed knowledge which enabled him to blackmail Hannah Sanburn; it was easy enough to understand how that well-bred New England woman would fight to preserve her good name, and how, if the lama had once tempted her into one false position, she could be terrified from bad to worse. There is more deliberate blackmail in the world than most of its indirect victims suspect.

Nevertheless, Ommony wondered that Hannah Sanburn should not have confided in himself. She might have known he would have shielded her and helped her to redeem the situation. She had had dozens of proofs of his friendship. He smiled rather grimly as he thought to what lengths he would have gone to shield and befriend Hannah Sanburn—and yet more grimly—cynically—as it dawned on him to what lengths he might now have to go. Friendship is friendship—unto death if need be.

Benjamin returned; and an hour's thought had had its effect on him, too. His assistants came, and he chased them out on hurriedly invented errands, barring the shop door behind them.

"I have sent for Maitraya," he announced, stroking his beard, watching Ommony sidewise.

He seemed to be not quite sure that Ommony might not have changed his mind with daylight.

"All right. Hunt me out a costume."

Ommony stepped off the pile of blankets and began to strip himself. Benjamin's swift fingers sought and plucked along the shelves, selecting this and that until a little heap of clothing lay ready on a table, Ommony saying nothing but observing almost savagely, like a caged man watching his meal prepared.

"There, that is perfect," said Benjamin at last. "A dude—a dandy, such as actors are—aping the high caste—too educated to submit to inferiority—a little of this, a little of that—fashionable—tolerated—half philosopher, half mountebank——"

Stark naked, Ommony confronted him, and Benjamin betrayed the naked fear that has nothing to do with physical consequences. Ommony looked straight into his eyes and analyzed it, as he had done fifteen years ago when he protected Benjamin against accusers.

"All right, Benjamin. I'll trust you this once more. But no flinching. See it through."

He dressed himself, Benjamin watching alertly for the least mistake, but that was an art in which no man in the world could give Ommony instruction; he knew costumes as some enthusiasts know postage stamps, and he bound on the cream-colored silk turban without a glance in the mirror that Benjamin held for him.

"I'll need an old trunk now, and three or four changes," he said abruptly. "No, cowhide won't do— No, there's glue in that imported thing— Observe caste prejudices, even if I'm supposed to have none— Basketwork's the stuff. That's it. Throw me in a trousseau."

He began to pace the floor, adjusting himself to the costume, finding it not difficult; his natural, sturdy gait learned in forest lanes with a gun under his arm suggested independence and alertness without a hint of drill, which is the secret of self-assurance; add good manners to that and an intimate knowledge; there is not much acting needed.

He looked stout and a bit important in the flowing cotton clothes. The short beard gave him dignity. His skin, weathered by twenty years of outdoor life, needed no darkening. Even his legs, and his bare feet thrust into red morocco slippers, had the ivory color that belongs to most of the higher castes; and an actor must be of Brahman or Kshattryia origin if he hopes to be admitted anywhere within the pale from which the lower castes are utterly excluded. His profession makes him technically unclean, but that is rather an advantage than a handicap.

"And the name? The honored name?" asked Benjamin admiringly.

"Gupta Rao. I'm a Bhat-Brahman of Rajputana."

Benjamin sat down and laughed with his head to one side, nursing a knee.

"Oh, you Ommony! A Jew you should have been! Now who would have thought of that but you! Yah-tchah! Bhat-Brahman—of whom even rajas are afraid. Gossiping tongue! The privilege to slander! Yah-keh-keh-keh! You are a clever one! Not even a Brahman will challenge you, for fear you will make him a laughing-stock! Keh-hah-hah-hey-hey-hey!

"Ah, but wait, wait! We forgot the *pan*. You must have a pouch to carry betel-nut. And the caste mark—keep still while I paint the caste mark."

AND then at last came Dawa Tsering, not pleased with himself but trying to appear pleased, adjusting his eyes to the dimness as Benjamin let him in by the back door.

"Where is Ommon*ee?*"

He stared about him, brushed past Ommony contemptuously, and at last saw the cast-off dinner jacket and white shirt. He broke into the jargon-Hindustani that serves for *lingua franca* in that land of a hundred tongues, chattering as he hurried along the passage past the stairs and back again:

"Where is he? Is he hiding? Has he gone?"

Then, shouting at last in something near panic—

"Oh—Ommon*ee!*"

He stared at Diana, but she gave him no information. She lay curled up on the floor, apparently asleep. Benjamin looked noncommittal—busy considering something else.

"Where is he—thou?" the Hillman demanded, coming to a stand in front of Ommony and fingering the handle of his knife.

The light was dim just there where the saddles were piled in a ten-foot heap.

"Would you know his voice?" asked Ommony.

"Aye, in a crowd!"

"Would you know his walk?"

"None better! Seen from behind, when he is thinking, he rolls thus, like a bear. But who art *thou?* Where is he?"

Ommony turned his back, walked to the heap of blankets by the wall, and sat down.

"Would you know him sitting?" he asked casually; and suddenly it occurred to Dawa Tsering that he was being questioned in his own tongue.

"Thou!" he exclaimed. "Well, may the devils destroy the place! Art thou then a magician?" He sniffed three times. "Not even the smell is the same! Was it the Jew who worked the magic? Art thou truly Ommon*ee?*"

"No, I'm changed. I'm Gupta Rao. If you ever call me Ommony again without my permission I will bring to pass a change in your affairs that you will remember! Do you understand?"

"Gupta Rao—huh? A change—eh? Hmn! And that is not a bad idea. Change *me*, thou! There are many garments in this place—buy me some of them. That lama played a dirty trick on me. He has vanished. I found his *chela*, Samding, and I told him the lama owes me two months' pay; and I said, 'Where is the lama?'

"But Samding, standing by a covered bullock-cart—but the cart was empty, for I looked—laughed at me and said nothing. I would have killed him if I had not thought of that letter, which you said the lama *must* receive.

"So I slapped Samding's face with the letter and threw it on the ground in front of him and bade him pick it up and find the lama or take the consequences. And *he* said, with that mild voice of his, that I had become very reckless all at once, so I hustled him a time or two, hoping to make him strike me, that I might with justice strike him back. But he has no fight in him.

"He picked up the letter, holding it thus, because there was dirt on it and he hates to soil his hands. And he said to me, 'The lama has no further use for you!' Do you hear that, thou—what is thy name?—Gupta Rao? Did you ever hear the like of it for impudence?

"You wonder, I suppose, why I didn't smite Samding there and then, so that the lama would have no further use for *him*. Trust me, I would have done; but two great —— of Tibetans came out of a doorway and seized me from behind. Lo, before I could draw my knife they had hurled me into a party of Sikh soldiers who were passing, so that I broke up their formation, they blaming *me* for it, which is just like Sikhs. And it isn't wise to argue with too many Sikhs, so I ran.

"Now— What is thy name again? Gupta Rao? Well—it would now be fitting to disguise me, so that I may come on that lama and his *chela* and the whole brood of them unawares. Then let us see what one man can do to half a dozen!"

Ommony got up and began to pace the floor again. It would be difficult to disguise Dawa Tsering, even if that were advisable, for the man had a swagger that was as much a part of him as his huge frame, and a simplicity that underlay and would inevitably shine through all cunning. Yet the man would be useful, since he knew more than a little about the lama's goings and comings; and, once in the Hills, where a man without an armed friend has a short life and a sad one as a rule, he would be almost indispensable.

HE HAD not made up his mind what to do when one of Benjamin's assistants hammered on the shop door and announced Maitraya. Dawa Tsering sat down beside Diana, who seemed to have decided he was tolerable, and Maitraya entered stagily, as if he thought he were a god or wished other people to believe him one. He was not a very big man, but he had a trick of filling up the doorway and pausing there before he strode into the room to seize by instinct the most conspicuous position and command all eyes.

His face was rather wrinkled, but he was richly clothed in new Tussore silk with a gorgeous golden *cummerbund*,* and his gallant bearing tried to give the lie to fifty years. There were marks on his handsome face that suggested debauch, but might have been due to former hardship; his manner on the whole was one of dignity and conscious worthiness.

One could tell at a glance what were his views on the actor's art and on the position that actors should hold in the community; in another land he would have pestered the politicians for a knighthood. A pair of gorgeous black eyes, that he knew how to use with effect, glowed under a heavy lock of black hair that he had carefully arranged to fall in apparent carelessness beneath his turban.

"You wished to see me, Benjamin?"

His voice was tragic, his language Urdu, his diction refined to the verge of pedantry. Benjamin signed to him to be seated on a heap of blankets, but he declined the invitation like Cæsar refusing a throne—except that Cæsar could not have done it with such super-modesty.

"May all the glorious gods, and above all friendly, fortunate Ganesha, have worked on you and made you change your mind, O stubborn Benjamin! Father of money bags! Provider of finery for entertaining fools! Patient but too cautious Benjamin! May all the gods melt butter on you for your former trust in me, Maitraya—and may they also melt your heart!

"I need you, Benjamin. I have a bargain with that lama struck and bound. The man is crazy and a traitor to all his gods, but he knows a little. God knows they will tear him between wild asses for debauching his religion when he gets back to Tibet!

"Believe me or not, Benjamin—although I *hope* my word rings unsuspicious in your ears—he leans toward modern views! Can you imagine that—in a ringding lama from Tibet?

---

*Sash.

"He proposes just what I have always preached—to modernize the ancient plays, retaining their charm and morality, but making them comprehensible! The man is mad—mad as an American—but genuinely gifted with imagination. It will make me famous, Benjamin."

"Does he offer to pay you?" Benjamin asked dryly.

"Richly! Princely! Like a maharaja—with the difference—aha!—that he will settle regularly, instead of forcing me to borrow from his special moneylenders as the rajas do while I await his slow convenience. I tell you, Benjamin, the Lord Ganesha surely smiled on me in the hour of this lama's birth!"

"Did you ask for money in advance?" asked Benjamin.

"Not I, Benjamin. What do you mistake me for—a parasite? A beggar? A man without dignity? A hanger-on of some courtezan? Nay, nay! I remember my blessed friend Benjamin, who likes to do business at a reasonable profit, and who will be glad to advance me a little more, in order that I may pay what I already owe. Are we not *good* friends, Benjamin? Have I ever defrauded you or told you a word of untruth?"

"A man's word and his deed should be one," Benjamin answered. "I hold your *hundis** that you have not paid. There is interest due on them."

"True, Benjamin, true. I have been unfortunate. Who could have foretold smallpox, the death of three actors and the burning of a theater? But another might have repudiated, Benjamin. Another might have told you to hunt for your money where the smallpox and the fire are born! Kali† can care for her own! Did I repudiate? Did I not come and tell you I will pay in time?"

"The worst is, you are not the only one," said Benjamin. "I have another here who is heavily in my debt, although a famous actor, more famous than you and a much finer artist. This is Gupta Rao sahib, of Bikanir."

"I never heard of him," said Maitraya, looking slightly scandalized although prepared to condescend.

"He is a very great actor," said Benjamin. Whereat Ommony bowed with becoming gravity and Maitraya took his measure, up and down.

"Does he act in that beard?" he inquired.

"I have lately been acting the part of an Englishman," said Ommony; and his Urdu was as perfect and pedantic as Maitraya's.

"An Englishman? There are few who can do that with conviction." Maitraya stepped back a pace. "You don't look like an Englishman. No wonder you grew a beard. That is the only way you could have carried off the part at all without looking foolish. It takes a man of my proportions to play an Englishman properly. I have been told that I excel at it. I played once before the officers of a cavalry regiment at Mhow, and they assured me they believed I was an English gentleman until I stepped down off the stage. Watch this."

Maitraya inserted an imaginary monocle and gave an outrageous caricature of a stock Englishman as portrayed in comic papers on the European continent.

"—— —— fine weather, eh? Not bad, eh? What?"

"I see you are a genius," said Ommony. "I could not do it nearly as well as that."

"No, I dare say not. The actor's is an art that calls for technique. However, I dare say you are good in conventional parts," said Maitraya, mollified.

"I have seen him, and I am a good judge of such matters," said Benjamin. "What I have to say to you, Maitraya, is that I am anxious about the money which you and Gupta Rao owe me."

Benjamin put on his extra-calculating air that Jews use to make their customers believe there is something as yet undecided—an alternative course, less profitable to the customer. It is the oldest trick in the world—much older than Moses. Maitraya showed furtive alarm.

"My son-in-law is away on a long journey. It is costing too much. I need the money," Benjamin went on. "I will not advance you more—no, not a rupee more——"

"Unless?" said Maitraya.

He was watching the old Jew's face, flattering himself that he could read behind the mask and swallowing the bait as simply as a hungry fish.

"Unless you take Gupta Rao with you——"

"I could give him small parts," said

---

*Promissory notes.

†Goddess, among other horrors, of the small pox.

Maitraya, cautiously yet with a gorgeous magnanimity.

"—as leading actor," Benjamin went on, "on a leading actor's salary, so that he may have a chance to pay me what he owes."

"But I must first see him act," Maitraya objected. "I promised the lama a company of actors second to none, and——"

"And on this new *hundi* both your names must go," said Benjamin, "so that you are both responsible, and I can take a lien on Gupta Rao's salary if I so wish."

THAT stipulation started a long-winded argument, in which Ommony joined sufficiently to add confusion to it and support Benjamin by pretending to support Maitraya. Benjamin's investment in costumes, theatrical properties and cash would be considerable, and there was no reason why the shrewd old merchant should not protect himself.

At the end of an hour of expostulation, imprecation, gesticulation and general pandemonium Benjamin had his way, vowing he had never made a more unprofitable bargain in his life; and Maitraya was convinced that Gupta Rao had at least a rich vocabulary. Moreover, as fellow victims of necessity, with their names on a joint promissory note, they had an excuse for friendship, of which Ommony took full advantage.

"Being of Brahman origin," Ommony said, "of course I have access to inner circles and enjoy privileges that are denied to you; and if I were an ordinary Brahman I would not join forces with you. But we Bhats consider ourselves above caste, and when we find an outcaste of merit and distinction, such as you evidently are, we believe it no dishonor to befriend him. You will find it a great advantage to have me in your company, and for many reasons."

Maitraya was readily convinced of that. A Bhat enjoys more privileges than any scald did in the viking days, for there is none who dares to call him in question, and nowadays, at least in northern India, there is no authority that can discipline him. An orthodox Brahman is very easily kept within bounds, and it is next to impossible for a man of lower caste to pose as a Brahman successfully because at the first suggestion of suspicion he would be questioned narrowly and be required to give substantial proofs; if the proofs were not forthcoming the Brahmans would simply close their ranks against him. But who shall challenge the College of Heralds on points of etiquette?

The very pundits themselves, who are the fountain heads of orthodoxy, are at the mercy of the Bhats. A pundit who should challenge a Bhat's veracity or privilege would lay himself open to such scurrilous attack, in song and jest and innuendo, as he could never stand against. He would be in the position of a public man in Europe or America who should dare to defy the newspapers.

The only limits to a Bhat's audacity are imposed by his own intelligence and his own gift of invective. He may act, sing, dance in public and be undefiled; he may accept gifts whose very shadow no orthodox Brahman would dare to let fall on his doorstep; and that source of strength is the secret of his weakness at the same time, since, like the press that accepts paid advertising, he has to be careful whose corns he crushes.

Maitraya, finding himself linked with this Gupta Rao by a contract, which Benjamin would certainly enforce, began at once to take good care to establish cordial relations. He was even deferent in his remarks about the beard.

"Beautiful it is, and manly—good to see, Gupta Rao, but—for certain parts and certain purposes—will it not be inconvenient?"

Ommony conceded that point. He withdrew to a little dark room and removed the beard by candlelight, using a razor belonging to one of Benjamin's assistants and, since the skin was paler where the hair had been, rubbing on a little dark stain afterward. While that was going on Maitraya was regaled by Benjamin with accounts of Gupta Rao's audacity and influence.

"Then why is he not rich?" Maitraya asked. "These Bhats are notorious for luxury. Everybody gives them presents to keep their tongues from wagging."

"That is just it," Benjamin explained. "Too much luxury! Too many gifts! It spoils them. This one is a gambler and a patron of the courtezans, who favor him exceedingly. Tshay-yay-yay! What a weakness is the love of women! But he is on his good behavior at present because, says he, a Bikaniri broke his heart. But the truth is, she only emptied his pockets."

"And that great dog?" Maitraya asked. "To whom does that belong?"

Benjamin stroked his beard and hesitated. But Ommony had heard every word of the conversation through the thin partition.

"And that great savage beside the dog—that Northerner—who is he?" asked Maitraya.

Ommony emerged, having reached a conclusion at last as to what should be done with Dawa Tsering and Diana.

"I must count on your honor's sympathy and good will," he said, smiling at Maitraya rather sheepishly. "That hound is the agent of Hanuman.* The man from Spiti is a simpleton whose service is to keep the hound in good health and to assist with occasional amorous errands. Our friend Benjamin has not told all the truth. Whose heart is broken while he can communicate with his beloved?"

Maitraya smiled. He had acted in too many plays, in which the plot consisted of intrigue between man and woman, not to accept that sort of story at face value. Life to him was either drama or else mere drudgery. Ommony excused himself to go and talk with Dawa Tsering.

"Now this dog is used to a dog-boy," he said sternly. "Moreover, she will do as I say, and if you are kind to her she will be tolerant of you."

Diana smelled Ommony over inquisitively. The strange clothes puzzled her, but, having nosed them thoroughly, she lay down again and waited.

"She is an incarnation of a devil," said Dawa Tsering. "I am sure of it."

"Quite right. But she is a very friendly devil to her friends. I am going to tell her to look after you; and she will do it. And I order you to look after her. Keep the fleas off her. Attend to it that she is clean and comfortable."

"What then?"

"The Jew shall provide you with new clothing after you have cleaned yourself. When I go presently with that man Maitraya you are to remain here, and you will see that the dog will remain with you willingly. At the proper time you are to come and find me."

"But how, Ommon*ee?* How shall I find you?"

"Don't call me Ommony! Remember that. My name is Gupta Rao."

"That makes you even more difficult to find!"

"You are going to learn what the dog can do. When I send a messenger the dog will follow him; but you are to remain here, do you understand? You are not to move away on any condition. When it suits my convenience the dog will return to this place alone and will bring you to wherever I may happen to be. Do you understand?"

"No, I don't understand, but I will wait and see," said Dawa Tsering. "I think you would make a good thief on the terains, Om—I mean, Gupta Rao!"

CHAPTER X

VASANTASENA

Men agree that prostitution is an evil, and They who know more than I do have assured me this opinion is right. But there are many forms of prostitution, and it may be that among the least of them is that of women, bad though that is. I have seen men sell their souls more inexcusably than women sell their bodies—and with more disastrous consequences—to themselves and to the buyer.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

IT TOOK five minutes to convince Diana that she was henceforth responsible for Dawa Tsering, but once that fact had been absorbed she accepted the duty without complaint. There was no whimper from the hound when Ommony accepted Maitraya's invitation to go in search of the lama.

He and Maitraya, side by side in a *tikka-gharri,** drove through the crowded streets, now and then passing Englishmen whom Ommony knew well. Members of the mercantile community, Moslems as well as Hindus, bowed to Maitraya from open shop windows or from the thronged sidewalk as if he were a royal personage. Men who would not have let his clothing touch them because of the resulting caste-defilement, were eager to have it known that they were on familiar terms with him; for a popular actor is idolized not only in the West.

"You see, they know me!" said Maitraya proudly. "Men whose names I can't remember pay me homage! Actors are respected more than kings and priests—and justly so. *They* rule badly and teach nonsense. It is *we* who interpret—*we* who hold example up to them!"

The man's vanity delivered him tied and bound to Ommony's chariot wheels. There was nothing to do but flatter him, and he would tell all he knew, accepting the flatterer as guide, philosopher and friend appointed for his comfort by the glorious gods.

---

*The monkey-god—patron of love-affairs.

* A one-horse open cab.

"I am surprized that a man of your attainments should condescend to employment by this lama person," said Ommony. "Of course, if you are willing, so am I, but how did it come about?"

"You would never believe. He is a very strange lama—more unusual than rain in hot weather or the sun at midnight; but I have a gift for attracting unusual people. By Jinendra, Gupta Rao, I have never seen the like of him—even in these days, when everything is upside down.

"He has a *chela* by the name of Samding, who has more genius in his little finger than any dozen statesmen have in their whole bodies. Not that it would do to tell him so—I don't believe in flattering beginners; they can't stand it. And he lacks experience.

"That lama must be a very expert teacher. The first time I met him, he was one of a crowd who watched me act *Charudatta* in 'The Toy Cart'—a part that I excel in. Afterward he invited me to witness a performance in private by his *chela*, and I went with him to a mysterious place kept by some Tibetans at the end of a stone courtyard—the sort of a place where you would expect to be murdered for your shoe-leather—a place that smelled of rancid butter and incense and donkey stables. Woof! I shudder now to think of it!

"But the *chela* was marvelous. Calm—you never saw such equipoise—such balance of all the faculties! And a voice as if a god were speaking! The middle note, true as a bell, like a gong to begin with every time, rising and lowering from that with utter certainty—half tones—quarter tones—passion, pathos, scorn, command, exhilaration—laughter like a peal of bells—wait until you have heard it, Gupta Rao! You will be as thrilled as I was. You will say I did not exaggerate. Perfect! If only success doesn't turn the boy's head!"

"What language?" asked Ommony.

"Prepare to be amazed! Ancient Sanskrit — modern Urdu — with equal fluency and equal grace! Distinct enunciation—and a command of gesture that expresses everything, so that you know what he will say before he speaks!

"But that is not all. I tell you he is marvelous! He has the modern touch. He understands how to play an ancient part so that it means something to the uninitiated. I am already jealous of him! I tell you, when that boy has had the advantage of my instruction for a while he will be great—the greatest actor in the world!"

"What proposal did the lama make?" asked Ommony.

"A crazy one. I told you the man is mad. He proposes to give *free* entertainments—on tour—at places selected by himself—for an indefinite period. I am to provide a troupe of excellent actors, for whom I am to be responsible. There are to be three women among them; but the dancers will be provided by the lama, as also the music, and Samding the *chela* is to play the leading female parts."

"I am surprized he takes any women at all," said Ommony. "There's a prejudice against actresses. They're always a nuisance. Properly trained boys are better. If a man plays leading woman, the women will only make him look absurd by contrast."

"Well, that is *his* affair. I suggested that, but the lama insisted. And mad though he undoubtedly is, he knows his own mind and is shrewd in some respects.

"I lied to Benjamin when I said I had not asked for money in advance. I did my best to hold out for that—naturally. But I suspect the lama knows a lot about me, and he certainly knows Benjamin; he told me to go to Benjamin and to get what credit I may need from him.

"Do you see the idea? If he and Benjamin have a private understanding that gives him an extra hold over me—it makes me practically powerless to oppose him in anything, however ridiculous his demands may turn out to be. You see, I have to pay Benjamin's bill. However—here we are."

AND where they were was not the least surprizing feature of the mystery. The *tikka-gharri* drew up at an arched gate in a high wall, over which trees leaned in well-cared-for profusion. There were cut flowers tucked into the carving on the arch, and blossoms strewn on the sidewalk.

A dozen carriages, most of them with thoroughbred horses, waited in line near the gate, and the dazzling sun projected on the white wall shadows of thirty or forty men in turbans of every imaginable color, who seemed to have nothing to do but to lounge near the entrance. Some of them nodded at Maitraya; several salaamed to him; one or two were at pains to stare insolently.

In the gateway was a fat *chuprassi* with a lemon-colored silk scarf, and the whitest clothes that ever any man wore—whiter than the wall, and starched stiff. He stood guard over about fifty pairs of slippers, most of which were expensive, and nearly all of which looked new. There was no question as to what kind of house it was—or rather palace; and there was music tinkling in a courtyard, which confirmed the general impression.

"Vasantasena's birthday," said Maitraya. "They began to celebrate at dawn. But what does that matter? We are not rich fools who have to race to do the fashionable thing. Our presence honors her, however late we come. Have you a present ready? Lend me a piece of gold, will you?"

"Where should I get gold?" asked Ommony—instantly aware that he was teetering on the edge of his first mistake.

Maitraya cocked a wondering eye at him; it was quite clear that he knew all about a Bhat's resources, even if the Bhat himself, for unimaginable reasons, should choose to have forgotten them.

"I will improvise a poem in her honor," Ommony explained as they passed through the gate. "Women enjoy poems, and I am good at them. Give me a glimpse of her, and then see."

"Ah, but they like the poem gilded! Women are practical! Moreover, I am no poet," said Maitraya. "Now one gold piece from each of us——"

Ommony smiled. Without the beard he looked as obstinate as ever, but humorous lines were revealed at the corners of his mouth which the beard had hidden. He decided to put his disguise to a severe test now, while the consequences of detection might not be too disastrous.

"All right," he said kicking off his slippers under the archway and accepting the *chuprassi's* salaam with a patronizing nod, as if the fellow were dirt beneath his sacred feet. "I will attend to it."

Beyond the arch there was a small, paved courtyard, around the walls of which were flowers growing in painted wooden troughs. There were several tradesmen squatting there with trays of jewelry in front of them, silver and even golden images of gods, and all sorts of valuable gifts that a visitor might buy to lavish on the lady who kept house within. The tradesmen were noisy, and sarcastic when not patronized.

Maitraya bridled, his vanity not proof against insinuations that he probably had squandered all his fortune long ago on much less lovely women. But one hard stare from Ommony, and the banter ceased.

"I will sing a song to Vasantasena about the jackals at her gate!" he said sternly; whereat one of them offered him money and another tried to thrust a silver image of a god into his hands.

But he brushed all those offers aside.

"Shall a Bhat Brahman take gifts from such as you?" he demanded.

"*Pranam! Pranam! Paunlagi!*" they murmured, raising both hands to their foreheads, whereat he blessed them, as a Brahman is obliged to, with the curt phrase that means "Victory be unto you;" and he and Maitraya passed on, through another arch, into a courtyard fifty feet square.

There was a fountain in the midst, around which about a dozen well dressed Hindus were gossiping.

"*I* would have taken the fool's money," said Maitraya. "Are you not entitled to it?"

Ommony glanced at him contemptuously.

"A tiger, if he wishes, may eat mice!" he answered. "A bear may eat frogs—if he likes them! A pig eats all things!"

Maitraya looked chastened.

There came across the courtyard, swaggering toward them, an heir to an ancient throne, in rose-pink turban and silken breeches, with silver spurs nearly six inches long, and a little black mustache on his lazy face that looked as if it had been stuck on there with glue. He whacked his long boots with a rhino-hide riding whip and rolled a little in his gait, as if it were almost too much trouble to support his vice-exhausted frame. He was for passing without notice, but Ommony stood by the fountain and mocked him. He knew that youngster—knew him well.

"Do they still wean young princes on camel's milk and whisky in Telingana?" he asked tartly. "I have heard tales of changelings. Return, O treasure of a midwife, and hear me sing a song; I know a good one!"

The gossipers around the fountain pricked their ears. The prince seemed to come out of a day dream.

"Ah! Oh! I kiss feet!" he exclaimed, and made as if to pass on.

But Ommony was determined to try his hand to a conclusion.

"Those boots are not respectful. They offend me!" he sneered. "Are they cowskin? They look like it!"

"Oh, ——!" remarked the prince in English. "Here, take this and confer a blessing," he went on in Urdu, diving into his pocket.

"Gold!" warned Ommony. "I declare you gave gold to the woman in there. All fees are payable in gold!"

"Gold? I have none. You must take this," said the prince and passed a handful of crumpled paper money. "*Pranam.*"

"Victory be unto you," said Ommony, accepting it, and the prince made his escape, muttering under his breath at the insolence of Brahmans, and of Bhats in particular.

"But paper money is no good," Maitraya objected. "*I* have paper money," he added, lying for vanity's sake.

But Ommony was creeping into the Bhat-Brahman part.

"Why didn't you say so? Go and buy mohurs* then from the *sonar*† at the gate."

"Nay, Gupta Rao, you said *you* would provide the presents. It is only fair. You owe me a consideration. And besides, now I come to think of it, I left most of my money at home."

Ommony thrust the paper money contemptuously into Maitraya's hands, smiling in a way that spared the actor no embarrassment.

"Go and buy mohurs at the gate," he said. "I wait here."

Maitraya returned presently with four gold coins and offered two of them.

"The *sonar* cheated me—he cheated like a dog!" he grumbled; but Ommony shrugged his shoulders and waved the coins aside.

"Give them all to the woman. I have another way to make her smile," he said, looking important.

Maitraya approached humility as closely as professional pride would permit.

"It occurs to me I did not ask a blessing when we first met. I crave forgiveness. Your honor was so unusually free from false pride that I overlooked the fact you are a Brahman. *Pranam.*"

Ommony murmured the conventional curt blessing, and dismissed the apology as if it were beneath notice. They passed into another courtyard on to which awninged windows opened from three sides. In a corner a dozen musicians were raising bedlam on stringed instruments, their tune suggestive of western jazz but tainted, too, like Hawaiian music, with a nauseating missionary lilt.

Fashionable India, in the shape of thirty or forty younger sons of over-rich Hindus and a sprinkling of middle-aged roués, was amusing itself in a bower of roses and strong-smelling jasmine, while in a corner of the courtyard opposite the music three girls were dancing more modestly than the scene would have led a censor of morals to expect.

It was a gorgeous scene, for the sun beat down on a blaze of turbans and the awnings cast purple shadows that made it all seem unreal, like a vision of ancient history. Maitraya was greeted noisily by a dozen men; he bowed to them right and left as if accepting applause as he entered a stage from the wings. The girls danced more vigorously, under the eyes of an expert now, whose approval might be of more than momentary value. Professional zeal took hold of the musicians; the tune grew louder and less careless.

"Beware! Vasantasena is in a *begum's* fury!" some one shouted. "None can satisfy her. Prince Govinda of Telingana gave her a quart of gold mohurs, and she sent him away because he had dared to call on her in riding boots! I advise you to try her with two quarts of gold, and to crawl on your belly!"

A stone stair gave on to the courtyard, through a doorway guarded by two tall serving men—immaculate, proud images of stern propriety, turbaned and sashed with blazing silk. They looked incapable of smiling, or of anything except the jobs they held; but as gilt, as it were, on the surface of sin they were unsurpassable.

Ommony's disguise and manner aroused no suspicion, although swift suspicion was what they were paid to exercise and they would have thrown him out into the street if as much as a suggestion had crossed their minds that he might be a European. They

---

*A gold coin, value about one pound sterling.
†A goldsmith.

scrutinized him and Maitraya carefully, then passed them up the stairs as autocratically as if they were masters of ceremony passing judgment on attendants at a royal levee.

But royal levees are easier for outsiders to attend than that one was; and royalty, even in India, is shabby nowadays because its power is at most a shadow of the past, and its forms mean nothing more than a cheap desire by unimportant folk to strut in a reflected pseudo-glory. Kings and conquerors go down; but whoever thinks that the power of the Pompadours has waned knows very little of the world or human nature. Vasantasena wielded more influence and could pull more hidden wires than any dozen maharajas, and the court she kept, if rather less splendid than a royal one, was alive with the mysterious magnetism of actual personal power. It was almost tangible, and much more visible than if she had been surrounded by men in armor.

Upstairs there was no attempt at glittering display, but art and old-world luxury in every considered detail A hall, paneled in carved teak and hung with Rawalia woven curtains and a silver lamp on heavy silver chains, conveyed no suggestion of wickedness; a Christian bishop could have trodden the soft Persian rug—had he dared—and have imagined himself in the midst of sanctity.

But as Ommony and Maitraya reached the stairhead the curtains facing them across the hall were parted, and a girl peeped through whom hardly a Wahabi ascetic would associate with thoughts of paradise. She was much too paganly aware that life is laughter, and that men are amusing creatures, to be criticized by standard formula. She looked like a mother-o'-pearl Undine faintly veiled in mist—one of those fabled spirits who may receive a human soul perhaps some day by marriage with a mortal—when she slipped out through the curtains and stood more or less revealed. She was clothed, and from head to foot, but not in obscurity.

She greeted Maitraya with a smile of recognition that suggested no familiarity. She was friendly, but perfectly sure of herself, and as sure of his unimportance. Then she glanced at Ommony, observed the caste-mark on his forehead and made him a little mock salaam, covering her eyes with both hands and murmuring, *"Pranam."*

"This is Gupta Rao sahib. The Joy of Asia will be pleased to see us both," said Maitraya, assuming his courtliest air; whereat the girl laughed at him.

"She is not so easily pleased," she answered, glancing at Maitraya's hand.

There was not much that her dark eyes missed. He gave her one of the gold mohurs, and then she stared straight at Ommony. Maitraya nudged him, trying to slip a mohur into his hand; but if you are to act the part of a Bhat-Brahman it is as well not to begin by bribing any one who can be overawed.

"I have a song to sing!" said Ommony. "Shall I include you in it? Shall I add a verse concerning——"

Swiftly she drew the curtain back and, laughing impudently over-shoulder at him, signed to him rather than to Maitraya to follow her down a short, wide corridor to a door at the end that stood slightly ajar and through which came a murmur of voices. Through that she led without ceremony into a square room in which half a dozen men were seated on a long, cushioned divan beneath a window at the farther end. They were wealthy, important-looking men, one or two of middle age. Girls, dressed as unobscurely as the one who had acted guide, were passing to and fro with cigarettes and sitting down between whiles on heaped cushions near the men's feet. In the center of the room a white-robed Hindu was making two costumed monkeys perform tricks, solemnly watched by the men in the window, who took scant notice of Ommony and Maitraya.

Vasantasena was not there. Her richly draped divan under a peacock-colored canopy at the end of the room facing the window was vacant, although two girls with jeweled fans lounged on cushions, one on either side of it, as if she were expected to come presently.

The sharp cries of the man with the monkeys and the occasional giggle of a girl punctuated an underhum of murmured conversation from the men by the window. The atmosphere was loaded with dim incense and cigaret smoke, blown into spirals of bluish mist by a punkah that swung lazily, pulled by a cord through a hole in the wall. Ommony sat down crosslegged on a cushioned couch against the wall midway between the window and Vasantasena's divan, and Maitraya followed suit. Two girls, possessed of patronizing smiles, brought cigarets and a little golden lamp to light them by.

It was sixty seconds before Ommony grew aware of the essential fact. He lighted a cigaret and blew smoke through his nose before he dared to look a second time, for fear of betraying interest. Having satisfied himself that Maitraya was studying the girls with an air of professional judgment, assumed for the perfectly evident purpose of disguising a middle-aged thrill, and that after one glance none of the men in the window were in the least interested in himself, Ommony let his eyes wander again toward the darkest corner of the room beyond Vasantasena's divan. There, on a mat on the floor, sat no other than the Ringding Gelong Lama, Tsiang Samdup, with his *chela* Samding beside him.

THEY sat still, like graven images. The lama's face was such a mass of unmoving wrinkles that it looked like a carved pine knot with the grain exposed. He was dressed in the same snuff-colored robe that he wore when Ommony first saw him in Chutter Chand's back room, and if he was not daydreaming, oblivious to all surroundings, he gave a marvelous imitation of it.

The *chela* was equally motionless, but less in shadow, and his eyes were missing no detail of the scene; they were keen and bright, expressing alert intelligence, and each time Ommony looked away he was aware that they were watching him with a curiosity no less intense than his own. But they refused to meet his. Whenever he looked straight at the *chela*, although he could not detect movement, he was sure the eyes were looking elsewhere.

He was also very nearly sure that Samding whispered to the lama; the calm lips parted a trifle, showing beautifully even white teeth, but the lama made no acknowledgment.

"What is the lama doing in this place?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Maitraya, "but he told me to meet him here. Many important plans are laid in this place. Ah! Here she comes!"

Maitraya was nervous, suffering from something akin to stage fright, which consumes the oldest actors on occasion. It was clear enough that though he had been in the place before it was rather as an entertainer than a guest, and he was not quite sure now how to behave himself. He tried to shelter himself behind Ommony—to push Ommony forward as every one rose to his feet—every one, that is, except the lama and Samding, who appeared to be glued to the mat.

But Ommony was no man's fool, to rush in where Maitraya feared to tread. He wanted time for observation. He laughed aloud and swung Maitraya forward by the elbow, arousing a ripple of merriment from the women, as a door swung open behind where the lama was sitting and Vasantasena entered to a chorus of flattering comment from every one.

She was worth running risks to see; as gracious, modest to the eye and royal-looking as her attendant women were the opposite. Her dress was not diaphanous and not extravagant; she wore no jewelry except a heavy gold chain reaching from her shoulders to her waist, long earrings of aquamarine, plain gold bangles on her wrists and one heavy, jeweled bracelet on her right ankle. From head to knees she was draped in a pale-blue silk shawl that glittered with sequins.

By far her most remarkable feature was her eyes, that were as intelligent as Samding's, or almost; but her whole face was lighted up with intelligence, though as for good looks in the commonplace acceptance of the term there were none. She was too dynamic to be pretty; too imperious to arouse impertinent emotions. She was of the type that could have ruled a principality of Rajasthan in the days before those hotbeds of feudalism went under in a cycle of decay.

She took her seat under the canopy, settled herself on one elbow among the cushions with one small, henna-stained foot projecting over the edge of the divan, noticed Maitraya and suddenly smiled. That explained her. Her smile was the miracle of Asia—the expression of the spirit of the East that so few casual observers catch—a willingness to laugh—a knowledge that the whole pageant of life is only *maya* * after all and not to be taken too seriously—satisfaction that the sins of this life may be wiped out in the next, and the next, and that all inequalities adjust themselves ultimately. The true philosophy is sterner stuff than that; but it was impossible to see that smile of hers and not understand why men of the world paid her homage and tribute; she could see through any make-believe and pardon any crime but impudence.

---

*Delusion.

One could see how she wielded more power than a thousand priests and would very likely work less evil in the end, although fools were likely to go to swifter ruin in her company than elsewhere. She had force of character, and that is very bad for fools.

Maitraya bowed and stepped forward, for Ommony shoved him. The birthday tribute she had levied already that morning lay in a silver bowl on a little table to her right; Maitraya advanced to add his mite to it, bowed to her profoundly as he passed and dropped his coins on top of the yellow heap, murmuring platitudes.

"*Three* mohurs!" cried one of the fan-girls, and the men near the window laughed.

"Liar!" Maitraya exclaimed indignantly. I threw in five!"

"Three!" the girl repeated, laughing scornfully, whereat every other woman in the room except Vasantasena, who ignored the whole transaction, mocked him, and he went and sat down on the floor near the lama with his back against the wall, scowling as if poison and daggers were his only joy.

That left Ommony on his feet, wondering whether the Powers, which had treated him exceeding well in all emergencies until that moment, would still stand by. It would not be correct to say his heart was in his mouth; it was pumping like a big ship's engines, humming in his ears, and if it had not suddenly occurred to him that this woman was possibly one of the lama's agents for the traffic in white children he might have surrendered to nervousness. He forgot that she was too young to have had any hand in the incidents that Benjamin had told about—remembered only that the lama was there in her house, and that a Bhat-Brahman's tongue should be readier than nitroglycerin to go off and shake the pillars of any society.

"O Brighter than the Stars!—O Shadow of Parvarti! O Dew upon the Jasmine Blossoms!" he began. "I bring a greater gift than gold."

He was surprised by the ringing arrogance of his own voice. Vasantasena smiled. No man that day had dared to come empty-handed, yet with his mouth so full of brave words. The company had bored her. Here was a man who held out promise of amusement.

"What is greater than gold?" she inquired in tones that came rolling from her throat like organ music.

And on the instant he challenged her.

"Reputation!" he answered. "Shall I I sing thine? For thou and I are both from Rajasthan, O Moon of Men's Desire!"

She frowned and did not answer for a moment. It is quite in order to sing poems to a lady on her birthday, but it is not bad policy sometimes to know the words of the poem before giving a Bhat-Brahman leave to sing; what scandal they don't know they are almost always willing to invent.

"What is thy name?" she inquired, smiling again.

"Gupta Rao."

Her brows grew reminiscent, as if the name suggested vague connection with the past. She seemed not quite able to place it, but the men in the window scented a delicious piece of scandal and began calling for the song, and that naturally settled it; she was not going to be made foolish before a crowd.

"Did you not come with Maitraya?" she asked quietly. "Is your business not with Tsiang Samdup?"

"Subject to the Mirror of Heaven's smile," said Ommony, making an obeisance that verged on the brink of mockery.

She raised her voice, not very loud, but so that it vibrated with power:

"The noblemen who have honored me will find good entertainment in the inner courtyard. I will send down word as soon as I crave to rejoice in your lordships' smiles again!"

Without a murmur the guests got to their feet and bowed themselves out; if she had been an empress they could not have been more complaisantly obedient. They went with side glances at Ommony and nods to one another, implying that a great deal went on at times in that room that they would give their ears to know; but on the whole they more resembled overgrown children turned out to play than middle-aged, bearded courtiers given temporary leave of absence.

CHAPTER XI

"ALL THIS IN THE SPACE OF ONE NIGHT."

The most important thing is Silence. In the Silence Wisdom speaks, and they whose hearts are open understand her. The brave man is at the mercy of cowards, and the honest man at the mercy of thieves, unless he keep silence. But if he keep silence he is safe, because they will fail to understand him; and then he may do them good without their knowing it, which is a source of true humor and contentment.—From the Book of the Sayings of Tsiang Samdup.

THE girls took the seat in the window the men had vacated and sprawled there like sirens on a rock. Even the fan-girls joined them. It was quite clear there was a secret in the air; the ostentatious way in which the girls kept up a low-voiced chatter to show they were not listening was proof enough of that.

Vasantasena lay on the wide divan with a cushion beneath her breast and her chin on both hands, considering Ommony for several minutes before she spoke, presumably curious to know why he had come with Maitraya; possibly she thought the silence and the stare would break him down and make him offer an explanation, but he met her eyes with challenging indifference. Silence is the only safe answer to silence.

"Tsiang Samdup," she said at last, "let the girls put your mat here in front of me."

But the lama would not move. He shook his head. And Samding spoke:

"The holy lama knows where it is best to sit. He is not to be moved for convenience."

The voice was no more astonishing than is anything else that sets a keynote. It was like the rhythm of a tuning-fork. It changed the key—the very atmosphere, asserting fundamental fact, to which everything else must adjust itself or be out of harmony. Vasantasena raised her eyebrows, but yielded and changed her position so as to face the lama, signing to Ommony to squat down on a cushion beside Maitraya; which was disappointing, because it prevented him from watching the lama's face. He could only see Samding's profile beyond Maitraya's through the corner of his eye, but he marveled at that; it was as beautiful as a figure of the Buddha done in porcelain.

"If I am to let my piece of jade go," Vasantasena asked at last, "what reward have I?"

"None," said the lama; and that was another fundamental statement, issuing in a voice like the gong that starts the engines. It left nothing what ever to argue about.

"Then why should I do it?" Vasantasena asked.

"Because you wish to do it, and the wish is wise," the lama answered, as if he were replying to the question of a little child.

"How do you know I wish to do it?"

"How do you know you are alive?" the lama retorted.

Vasantasena laughed.

"I believe you know where you can sell it!" she said, in an obvious effort to lower the conversation on to a plane on which she might have the advantage.

"I *know* you do not believe that," said the lama.

Vasantasena sighed.

"How do you learn *such* knowledge?" she asked. "You seem to know everything. I am not ignorant. A hundred men come here, and none of them can make a fool of me, but——"

"Perhaps you are not a fool," the lama interrupted.

"No, I am not a fool. I can whisper a word here and a word there, and some of the evil that would have been done dies still-born—and some of the good that might never have been born has birth. And as for me, what does it matter? And yet—sometimes I think it does matter about me. And sometimes I think I will give all my money to the poor——"

"And rob them," said the lama.

"Rob them of what?"

She stared at him blankly.

"Of the moment. It is not wise to deprive them of the moment. At the moment of our utmost need, we learn."

"That is a heartless creed," she retorted, glancing at the money in the bowl beside her. "That would feed a thousand people."

"Nothing is heartless," said the lama. "It is better to eat consequences now than to put off the day of retribution. Better the sting of an insect now than a serpent's bite a year hence. Better an experience in this life than a thousandfold the bitterness in lives to come."

"What says the Bhat to that?" she asked suddenly, glancing at Ommony; and Samding came out of his immobility to give one swift, searching glance sidewise.

Privilege has its disadvantages. It is

one of the obligations of a Bhat that when appealed to he must say something; and the quicker he says it, the better for his reputation.

"I am not your priest. You would like to quote me against him, but I am only interested in learning why I was brought here," Ommony answered.

Vasantasena sneered. "Just like a Bhat! You think of nothing but your own convenience. Well, I am glad there is none of your money in my birthday bowl. Rather I will give you some of it. Here—help yourself."

"It is unclean money," said Ommony, falling back on the caste rules that a Bhat may observe even if the other Brahmans refuse him recognition.

"Is that true?" she asked the lama. "Is *any* money unclean? This is not all. I am rich. I have *lakhs* and *lakhs*."

"It is yours," the lama answered. "It is your responsibility."

"Well," she said, "as I told you before, if you will take it all, you may have it. I am about to become *Sanyasin**. I think the piece of jade will help me more than all my money. I will keep the jade."

"I will not take your money," said the lama. "Nor can you escape responsibility. There is a Middle Way, and the middle of it lies before you."

Vasantasena frowned, her chin on both hands, studying the lama's face. His bright old eyes looked straight back at hers out of a mass of wrinkles, but he did not move; if he smiled, there were too many wrinkles for any one to be quite sure of it.

"Well—I will call the girls," she said at last. "I will test you. You must tell me from which of them I received the piece of jade."

She clapped her hands, and the girls came hurrying from the far end of the room, standing in a line self-consciously. They were used to being admired, and it was quite in keeping with the probabilities that every one of them had been bought and sold at some early stage of her career; but there was novelty in this ordeal and they did not seem to know what to make of it.

"That one," said Vasantasena, nodding at the nearest, "is much the most popular."

"She has no other merit," said the lama, and the girl looked bewildered—piqued.

"And that one at the other end is the cleverest. She has the quickest wit of all of them. She might have stolen it."

"If so she would have kept it," said the lama, watching the girls' faces.

"The fourth from this end," he said. "She is the one. Let the others go."

At a nod from Vasantasena eight girls returned to the window seat and one stood still. She was the same who had admitted Maitraya and Ommony, only now all her self-possession had departed; she seemed to fear the lama as a cornered dove fears a snake. She was trembling.

"Why are you afraid?" the lama asked, as gently as if he were talking to a woman he would woo; but the girl made a gesture to her mistress for protection from him.

"She is afraid because you have read rightly," said Vasantasena. "I, too, am afraid. Are you in league with gods or devils?"

"That is not well," said the lama. "Whom have *I* harmed?"

"You are too wise," said Vasantasena.

"Macaulay the Eurasian had the stone," the lama went on in a booming voice. "A certain person gave it to him in a package to Tilgaun. That would have been well. yesterday to take it to Simla and thence But Macaulay the Eurasian was weak and dallied with a woman——"

"No Eurasian has *ever* been in my house!" Vasantasena interrupted, flaring.

"And the woman had a husband; and the husband was a Sudra* who was seeking education from a Brahman, so he gave the piece of jade to *him*. And the Brahman came hither, and boasted—and took opium ——"

"He brought the drug with him. I *never* gave any man opium!" Vansantasena interrupted.

"And she took the stone from him and brought it to you. All this in the space of one night," said the lama.

"But how do you *know*?"

"I do know."

"How do you know it was this girl?"

---

*In a sense this means "taking the veil," although the process is almost exactly the opposite. Just as men so often do in India, women sometimes renounce all worldly possessions and become wandering hermits, living in caves and practising inhumanly severe austerities. Such women, whatever their previous occupation may have been, are deeply venerated.

*Some Brahmans consent to teach the Sudra castes because of the enormous "gifts" they receive for doing so, but the practise is frowned on by the pundits and the guilty Brahmans are considered degraded, although not outcaste.

"She is the only one who would have given it to you. Any of the others would have kept it."

Ommony managed to master his emotions somehow, but it was not easy, for here was proof of a system of spying that outspied the Secret Service. How had the lama learned that the stone had been entrusted to McGregor, to be given in turn to Macaulay, to be taken to Tilgaun? Given that much information in the first place it might have been comparatively easy to trace the stone afterward, but—McGregor had surely not talked. Macaulay and McGregor's *sais* were the only possibilities.

Vasantasena groped under the cushions and brought out the piece of jade—the same piece that had been in Ommony's possession; there was no mistaking its peculiar shape or the deep-sea green translucence. The expression of Samding's face changed for a moment; he actually blinked and smiled, and the smile was as attractive as the marvel of the stone. Vasantasena noticed it.

"Give me your *chela* in exchange!" she said suddenly.

"I could endure that *chela!* He is almost fit to be a god. He needs only passion to awaken him. I can not understand this stone, which makes me dizzy to look into it, and dark with fear of myself. The *chela* makes me feel there is a future. I can look into his eyes and know that all wisdom is attainable. I will teach him passion, and he shall teach me pure desire."

The lama chuckled engagingly. His wrinkles multiplied, and his smile was as full of amusement as a Chinese fisherman's.

"Ask *him*," he said.

Vasantasena smiled at Samding—that same smile that had explained the secret of her influence. It promised unrestraint, indulgence without limit, and thereafter forgiveness. She held up the stone in her right hand, ready to exchange.

"A bargain?" she asked eagerly.

"No."

One monosyllable, abrupt and clear—F natural exactly in the middle of the note. A golden gong could not have answered more finally or with less regard for consequences.

Vasantasena started as if stung. Her eyes flashed, and her mood changed into savagery like a stirred snake's. The girl who was still standing before her shrunk and half smothered a scream. Maitraya ducked instantly with his face behind his hands.

Vasantasena flung the stone at Samding straight and hard. It struck him in the breast; but if it hurt he gave no sign. He covered the stone with both hands for a moment as if caressing it, wiped it carefully on a corner of his robe and passed it to the lama, who secreted it in his bosom as matter-of-factly as if the entire proceeding were exactly what he had expected.

"Go!" Vasantasena ordered hoarsely. "Begone from here! Never darken my door again! Go, all of you—you, and you—what is a dog of an actor doing here? A Bhat! A Bhat—a casteless Brahman! You defile my house! A gang of devil-worshipers! Girls—call the men-servants and throw them out!"

But the lama was quite unhurried. He got up from the mat and blessed Vasantasena sonorously in Tibetan, which she did not understand; it might have been a curse for all she knew.

Samding rolled up the mat. Maitraya got behind the lama for protection; and the girls hesitated to obey the order to use violence on any one as sacred as a lama or as dangerous as a Bhat. The lama led the way out of the room with his skirts swinging majestically, and Ommony brought up the rear, aware that the danger was by no means over. He paused in the door and met Vasantasena's furious stare.

"Shall *I* summon the guests from below?" he inquired; for that was the one risk he wanted to avoid. If he proposed it, she might imagine the risk was hers. "They would like to hear me sing a song of this!" he added.

"Go!" she screamed. "I will have you stabbed! I will have you ——"

"Shall I sing to them in the courtyard?" he asked; and as she choked, trying to force new threats out of her throat, he shut the door behind him and hurried to follow the lama, dreading what mood might overtake her during the minute or two before they could reach the street.

But the lama would not make haste, although Maitraya urged him in sibilant undertones. In the courtyard he chose to think the greetings called out to Maitraya were intended for himself and bowed, bestowing blessings right and left. Then solemnly and very slowly, as if walking were as mathematically exact a process as the precession of the equinox, he led the way into the outer courtyard, where he stood for a moment and studied the fountain as if it contained the answer to the riddle of the universe.

The sound of running footsteps did not break his meditation or upset the equanimity of Samding; but Maitraya, glancing over his shoulder, started for the gate and Ommony, muttering, "Oh, my God!" had to steel himself not to follow suit. The spirit of stampede was in the air. The two enormous sashed and turbaned janitors who kept the stairway to Vasantasena's upper room came shouting from the inner court—shouting to the man on guard at the outer gate; and Ommony's blood ran cold.

But they stopped shouting when they caught sight of the lama—stopped running—stopped gesticulating. Very humbly they approached him, offering a present from Vasantasena—gold in a silken bag, and a smaller bag of gold for Gupta Rao the Bhat, with a request that he should remember the donor kindly. They pressed the presents—followed to the gate, imploring, swearing their mistress would take deep offense and think it an ill omen if the gold were not accepted.

When the lama and Ommony persisted in refusing they tried to force both presents on Samding, and even followed to the street, where they snatched the flowers that were tucked into the carving of the arch and thrust them into the lama's hands. Not until a strange, old-fashioned one-horse carriage with shuttered sides drew up at the gate and the lama and Samding stepped into it, signing to Ommony and Maitraya to follow, was it possible to escape from the clamorous importunity; and even when the carriage drove away the voices followed after.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE FILIBUSTER NAVY

by Eugene Cunningham

AMONG the "fifty-six immortals" of William Walker in Nicaragua, when first he landed to aid the Democratic party, was a silent little Missourian, Irvine Callender Fayssoux, one-time officer in the Texan Navy, lately the naval man of Lopez, the Cuban filibuster. When Walker confiscated an enemy schooner, the *San José*, he renamed her the *Granada*, armed her and appointed Fayssoux commander of his "navy."

Fayssoux accepted the rank of lieutenant, the responsibility of upholding on the high seas the naval dignity of Nicaragua, with all solemnity. He began to cruise the Pacific side and look for enemy craft. Then the Costa Ricans, allying themselves to the anti-American Nicaraguans, put an army into the field and were defeated. They sent a brig, named the *Once de Abril—Eleventh of April*—in memory of their defeat ashore the previous year, to Nicaraguan waters.

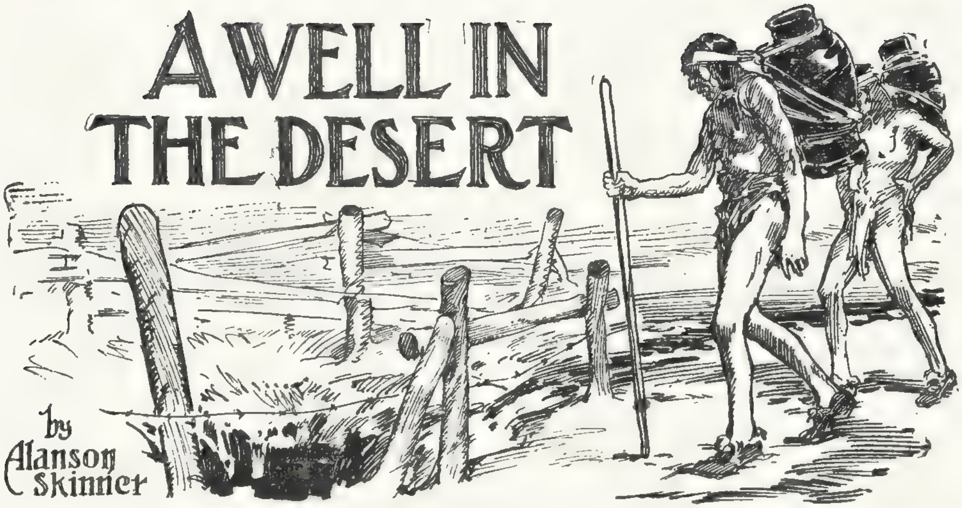
Fayssoux stood out to engage, though warned of the brig's superior tonnage and metal. Gradually the opponents drew out of sight, firing steadily. The folk ashore listened to the gunfire. Evidently Fayssoux was making a desperate resistance.

Then came the dull report of a great explosion. Jubilantly or sorrowfully, dependent upon their sympathies, the Americans and Nicaraguans recalled Fayssoux's promise that he would never be taken; he would blow up the *Granada* first, he had said.

The army was notified of the *Granada's* loss; of Fayssoux's heroism, but prematurely, it developed. For into port came Fayssoux, with the survivors from the brig aboard, which he had blown up by a lucky shot to the magazine.

Promoted to captain and with an estate deeded to him by the state, Fayssoux pursued his grim, efficient course during the whole of Walker's effort to hold Nicaragua against all comers. In April, 1857, when Walker surrendered at Rivas to Commander Davis, U.S.N., of the *St. Mary's*, the Walker flag flew last on the little *Granada.*

A WELL IN THE DESERT



by Alanson Skinner

Author of "They Call Him Akwinimi."

THE age-old city of Zuñi stands on a small hill in the shadow of the great mesa that is called Corn or Thunder Mountain. Here four hundred years ago rode Coronado the Spanish Conquistador and his armored knights and Indian allies, into a settlement already ancient.

Today the scenes have changed but slightly since the arrival of the Spaniard—the sky, the gray-red desert, the Corn Mountain, the stone and adobe terraced houses, and even their inhabitants, have a look of primitive antiquity. Here the white man may still gape at game or ceremony of a native people beyond his ken; here aboriginal life runs on almost unchanged.

My memories of Zuñi are largely confused visions of color. Of barbaric dances and dancers, of strange songs with quaint cadences, of booming drums, of stamping feet moving in rhythm. Blue skies and reddish mountains, the hot rays of the sun and jack-rabbits skipping behind the mesquite. Of days before the great ceremonies when all Zuñi was a-boil with preparation, when each inhabitant was busied drying his hair in the sun or washing the rich, blue-black locks of his neighbor. Of runners circling the Zuñi Valley at top speed, barefooted, and kicking a little stick regardless of cacti and thorns—of a great concourse of Indian people setting out on the annual rabbit hunt. Of lop eared burros—of women risking blistered fingers as they spread the corn-paste for paper-thin bread over the red-hot stones of the oven. Of stews with chile eaten out of painted ollas, with two fingers if the mixture was thick, and three if it was thin.

Over all the memory of the desert hovers like a lifted shroud. I recall shimmering heat and candelabra cacti, barrancas and dry arroyos, horned toads, darting lizards, mirages, rattlesnakes, ancient ruined cities, dust storms. Then the rare and unexpected torrential thunderstorms when the dry cracked earth ran with blood-red rivulets, flowers sprang up out of the dust, and from every gulley rose the vast croaking chorus of countless frogs that seemed to have been spawned of rain-drops where had been only tumbleweeds before.

THE great plaza at Zuñi was rapidly emptying of people, just as the vast New Mexican desert was emptying of daylight. The dark shadows that cloaked Towayallone the Thunder Mountain, had crept from mesa to mesa, and had enveloped the "Happy Center of the World," as the village of Zuñi is aptly called by its natives.

The drums of the Kawkokshi Society were stilled. The last grotesquely masked dancer had disappeared into the darkness of their secret chamber, and the mocking Mudhead clowns had retired to their own sanctum. Somewhere a burro brayed lustily, a dog howled with a lonesome cadence, and I was alone, sitting on the third tier of house-tops.

"A Well in the Desert," copyright, 1924, by Alanson Skinner.

"So ends the first lesson," I thought as I shut my notebook.

Picking my path among ollas and heaps of drying corn and chile peppers I crossed the house-tops to a ladder and by slow degrees climbed terrace after terrace until I came to the one I was seeking.

The one way to finish an evening which had been begun among such weird ceremonials, I had determined, was to listen for an hour to Gaiellito, Priest of the Bow and Grand Master of the Clowns, whom I had just seen at their queer frisking and fun making.

Gaiellito was a robust and vigorous old man whose priestly duties had enjoined upon him tolerance of all comers, beliefs, and customs, together with the twin virtue of everlasting good-nature under all circumstances. This was the law of the Mud-heads.

The old man looked up startled at my coming, his expression, however, changing instantly to one of genuine pleasure.

"My younger brother! How be ye, and how hast thou come unto the evening?" he cried, uttering the time-honored greeting of Zuñiland.

"Happily, happily," I answered in kind, squatting beside the gaily painted olla which held the old man's evening meal of stewed lamb and peppers.

"And thou comest here, my child!" ejaculated his wrinkled wife, selecting a morsel of food and placing it in the white man's mouth as a mark of special favor.

We chatted, while the old woman cleared away the litter after our meal, and as we pulled at our cigarets of corn-husk I asked—

"*Hai*, my older brother, and dost thou love all white men as thou sayest thou lovest me?"

The Priest of the Bow made a wry face:

"No, my child, not exactly. But I have been Awan Tatchu (All Father) of the Mud-head Clowns these many years, and that has taught me two lessons. One is, never be impatient of anything, especially of other races, people, or things which you do not understand. The other is the rule of my society, never lose your temper. The last is the hardest, and once, yes, over a white man, I nearly broke it. Shall I tell you?"

YOUNGER brother, (he continued) you know that the law of the desert is, "Never refuse a wayfarer water," even though he be a Mexican. (Here the old man spat with contempt.) Water is something never to be denied. Every one who dwells upon or even crosses the desert occasionally must have water. It is a law as old as the very day that the Zuñi came out of the Nether World.

Now three winters ago I went with some dozen of my people to the great sacred Salt Lake, far to the south of Zuñi at Las Salinas. It was at that time necessary to obtain salt to accompany the offerings at our ceremonies, for our tribal supply was running low. You know, younger brother, that the journey is a long one, and filled with dangers. There are the Navaho and the Apache to be considered, and always the dread of thirst. But, according to our custom, we made the trip, running the whole way with earthen canteens strapped on our backs, and did obtain the salt. Then came the journey homeward. By now our canteens were empty, but, by going a little farther, at the end of the second day we could arrange to arrive at the Ojo Frio, the Cold Well, and there gain life and strength with water once again.

Ah, my younger brother! It is bad to have the stomach empty, but that can be endured by men! But who is there among the living who can keep us day after day without drink? I tell you, my child, that our tongues were thick and cracked, and our voices hushed when the sun set on the second day. Scarcely were we able to drag one moccasin after another. Yet did we know where stood the Cold Well, and the thought of water kept our eyes bright and gave strength to our legs.

As the light died, we came in sight of the happy spot, but for a moment we started in amazement. A white man, a sheep herder, had built him an adobe house by the side of the fountain, and fenced it in for his animals and himself. Yet we pushed on, wearily, for on the desert no one had yet been known to refuse water to a traveler.

Now as we approached the well, we saw the white man come out of his house and look at us. Then he went to the ojo and raised up his bucket, and took it and the rope attached thereto into his house and shut the door. Yet we did not suspect anything until we came to the well itself. The walls were very steep and smooth, my younger brother, and very far down was the water. There was no way for us poor Zuñi to arrive at it, since the rope was gone, and some of us, there were twelve in all, were nearly perished with thirst, so that they went almost mad to see the water shining so far beyond our reach.

"Ah, my children," said I, "I am able to speak a little of the white man's language, I will approach his door and ask him humbly to lend us the rope that we may drink and be revived and pass on."

So I went to the door and rapped, after the fashion of the white people, with my hand. A voice, very hoarse and disagreeable, answered, demanding what I wanted, talking in Mexican. I was very glad then, for I do not at all well understand Americano, though I can talk Mexican. So I besought the sheep man to let us have the rope and the pail that we might get water to drink and refill our canteens. This time he replied in Americano, and with words that I well understood. Since we do not have such sayings in Zuñi I will not repeat them, except the last which was "—— —— Injun—go to ——."

I went back to my brothers who were waiting.

"This white one loves his water," said I. "He is too stingy to give us even a drop."

We sat there for some time, being very discouraged, for we were exceedingly dry, and it seemed impossible that even one of us should live to see Zuñi without water.

"What is in *your* mind, you who are a Priest of the Bow, and Awan Tatchu of the Mudheads?" at length asked one of my nephews, who was of our party.

For a time I said nothing, reflecting that it was my duty to keep my temper under all things, and to be tolerant of the ways of others. Then I said.

"Why then, it is in my mind, my younger brothers, that we leave this white one with his water, since he loves it so dearly, and that we return athirst to Zuñi, since we are a people of peace, and not given to anger."

And that is what we did, my well-beloved child. Only, first, we broke in the door and took the white one out. We wrapped him firmly in his well rope, and took him to the well.

"It is good to desire water, my brother," said I to him. "Among us Ashiwanni—Zuñi—we worship it as a gift of the gods. I am an old man, a Priest of the Bow, who conducts many of the ceremonies to make the rain fall, yet, in all these years I have never seen any one, even among us, who loved water as you do. Be not afraid, we be people of peace, and we will not part you from it. No, you shall have water always."

Having said this, we Ashiwanni raised him up, and dropped him into his well head first, without having hurt him in any particular, and I presume he remained there, guarding his much loved water, as long as he lived."

THE MOUNTAINEER

by Georges Surdez

Author of "When the Sun Sat Down," "Where No Man Hears," etc.

THE hills of Franche Comté surged eastward, until lost in the gray haze of the twilight sky. On a far slope, suspended like an eagle's nest, the Castle of Baucy emerged, as if grown from the mountain itself, a monstrous tumor of masonry, grim and cold. Towers and walls held the same rugged, inhuman appearance as the huge boulders left scattered by the receding ice-cap of a forgotten age. Bertrand de Baucy, the new lord, had come back to his domain but a few weeks before. His father had died four years previously, so that in the long period between 1220 and 1224, the countryside had had no active master.

The shadows gathered in the valleys, but the crests were still a-blaze with the last red rays of the failing sun. A tenuous silver stream glinting far below was the Doubs River. The silence increased the fairy-like aspect of the panorama, a silence broken only by the scream of the wind through the fir-pines, and the tinkling of cowbells from the pastures invisible among the trees.

Lahure emerged from the forest trail into an open space. He stood on a boulder and contemplated the countryside, idealized by the approaching darkness. His eyes filled with the beauty of the mountains. Within his heart welled a great, inarticulate love for his home land. He laid down the crossbow he was carrying, and remained silhouetted against the sky.

He gave a first impression of being short and stocky. But this was due to his width of shoulders and long arms. A closer scrutiny of his peculiar, heavily-set figure, would reveal that he stood several inches above ordinary height. His arms and legs were bare, muscular, denoting agility as well as strength. There was grace in his massiveness. A sleeveless leather jacket covered his torso, falling nearly to his knees. His feet were incased in soft skin sandals. He wore no hat.

The face was coarse, almost bestial. Massive nose, powerful jaws and heavy eyebrows combined to create a mask of ferocity. But his eyes, very light blue, were gentle, almost tender. Judged by his body and face, Lahure was a sort of ape-man, by his eyes, a child.

The tinkling of cowbells was suddenly dominated by the graver peal of church bells in the valley villages, ringing the Angelus. Lahure bent his head, and did not look up until the last brazen vibration had died out. When he lifted his face, the colors of the sky had shifted, and long bands of red streaked the horizon to the west. Small, golden-edged clouds moved swiftly before the wind. Lahure sensed the freedom of the mountains. Resentment that had been smouldering all day, grew, and he clenched his fists in sudden anger. He would not till the soil or herd cattle, even if the law and the Church combined against him.

The priest had chided him. And Guerin, the gamekeeper of the castle, had warned him not to hunt in the forests. De Baucy, lord of the district, had summoned him, and taken from him the privilege of hunting, a privilege granted by the ruler's father, Jean de Baucy, to Lahure's father, twelve years before. The mountaineer had grown up to a life of hunting. A privilege lost is worse than a privilege never held. There was also talk of making Lahure go down in the valley to till land. As well expect water to run up hill, as a mountain man to live in the low land.

After his father's withdrawal from the armies of France, due to wounds received in the hard fought day at Bouvines, when Philip-Augustus defeated Otho of Germany, Bertrand de Baucy had stayed with the banners for the rest of the Normandy Campaign. Later, he had gone south, to Toulouse, in the minor Crusade against the followers of the Greek, Nicetas, who were heretics and rebels against the Roman Church.

Having spent most of his life in camps, he had brought back iron-clad ideas that ill-fitted with his people's newly-acquired independence, and, from the first, friction had occurred. To enforce his wishes, however, the new lord had brought from the wars his hard, savage mercenaries, commanded by a petty noble from Guyenne, Lusignac, who bore the title of captain.

Lahure reasoned that it would have been much preferable for Bertrand de Baucy to stay with the new King, Louis VIII, and help this monarch in his expeditions in the Poitou Province. There was the place for a warlike man, not here among poor folks. But soldiers or no soldiers, Lahure decided he would keep on hunting. No imported archers could prevent him from killing a boar when he so wished.

He felt a momentary hesitation. He recalled Jean de Baucy. The old baron had often stopped before the Lahure hut, during hunting trips, and called for food. He had patted Lahure on the head and said: 'When this boy grows up, he will serve my son.' And old man Lahure had grinned with pleasure. But between the father and the son, there could be no comparison. Bertrand was proud, harsh. It seemed as if he must count every head of game in the forests, for the loss of one beast angered him.

"Let them stop me!" Lahure concluded, and picked up his crossbow. "Let them stop me, if they can."

He turned, and went into the forest.

THE next morning, at daylight, Lusignac, right hand mercenary of Lord de Baucy, mounted his horse in the courtyard of the castle. With him went twenty men, including Guerin, the gamekeeper, and Zebe, an archer famed throughout northern France. Each rider wore a light breast-plate and helmet, and was armed with sword and bow. The stated purpose was a boar hunt, but the wearing of armor portended a more serious intent.

Outside the main wall, Lusignac held his horse until Guerin came alongside.

"Where does this Lahure live?" he asked.

"In a hut, up the far mountain." Guerin indicated. "Is he the man we are after?"

"Yes. I feared to say this earlier, lest he be warned. He was hunting again last night?"

"Yes, captain."

"De Baucy is angered with him, but nevertheless does not wish him harm. From all I hear, he is an independent fellow. He has been warned several times, has he not?"

"By myself, and then by the baron," Guerin explained. "And one other warning will not stop him. I think that he should be allowed to go in peace. He kills only what is necessary for himself."

"As for me, I'll warn the man, and if he does not promise to behave, I'll handle him." He smiled and extended his hands. He was a large man, with a reputation for great physical strength. "I'll chastise him with these!"

"If you do so, captain, I'll stand by with a sword."

Lustignac's face darkened at the implied doubt.

"Don't interfere, whatever happens," he commanded.

Guerin did not insist further in his warning.

For several hours, the party trotted on the forest paths. From the dark pockets beneath the branches came the strong smell of fallen needles, a bracing, invigorating odor. Never had Lusignac seen such a country, and he had traveled far: Throughout France, in Palestine, in Spain and in the Germanic lands. The poetic instinct, strong in his southern blood, was awakened, and he sang softly.

At a cross trail, they came upon a wild sow with her young. She backed into the bushes, turned her snout defiantly toward them as the little ones ran into the undergrowth. Lusignac halted the ready arrows with a gesture, laughed and touched his steel cap.

"Peace, mother of swine," he saluted.

The sow disappeared, and Lusignac rode on. He was glad to be here, instead of searching for glory in the Holy Land, baked by the sun within his steel armor, as a lobster within its shell. He felt that he had taken the right course to follow de Baucy to his home.

At the edge of a clearing, he discerned a small stone hut, the walls moss grown, and almost buried in foliage. The door was opened, and smoke rose from the chimney.

"Who lives here?" he asked Guerin.

"Lahure."

Lusignac's arrogance returned. He forgot his carefree mood of a moment before. He dismounted and strode toward the hut. Guerin, following him, loosened the hilt of his sword in the scabbard. The slight noise annoyed Lusignac.

"Don't interfere," he repeated.

"No, sir."

Lusignac pounded on the door panel.

"Hello in there!" he called out.

A sound of footsteps within, and Lahure appeared.

"Greetings," he offered.

"Thou wilt leave this place before sundown," Lusignac said, without returning the salutation.

"Who orders?" Lahure demanded, evenly.

"I, Lusignac, for my lord de Baucy."

Lahure took in the strong party at a glance.

"It is well," he accepted.

Lusignac scorned to question him. He was surprized at this immediate surrender, and rather disappointed. He would have liked to prove to Guerin, low born as he was, that Lusignac was not afraid to match strength with the poacher, giant though he was. He saw only the acceptance of his orders. He did not know that Lahure, bowing before superior force, intended to leave the hut at sundown, as he had agreed, but only to seek another home in the mountains. And so, he sought for a way to engage a quarrel.

He pushed Lahure roughly aside, and strode within.

The hut was simply furnished, a single stool before the huge table which occupied the center of the beaten earth floor, a pile of boughs in the corner used as a couch. A fire-place was built within the wall itself, and on the fire, a cast-iron pot steamed and bubbled.

Lusignac wrinkled his nostrils.

"Hum—what hast thou there?" he asked.

"Stew, sir," Lahure answered. "And at your service if you desire."

"Made with stolen game, I suppose," Lusignac remarked.

Lahure did not answer, but brought the great iron pot to the table, and picked up a wooden spoon.

"For the meat, you may use your dagger," he suggested.

The crossbow, hanging on the wall, attracted the captain's attention. He took it down, worked the windlass and sprung the trigger.

"A large weapon," he said. "I'll take it."

Lahure paled, but said nothing.

Lusignac replaced the crossbow on its hook, approached the table, looked into the pot, sniffed.

"Smells flat."

"I have no spices, only salt," Lahure explained.

"And thou dost eat all thy food unseasoned, thus?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's too bad. But I'll season this for thee."

He bent near the pot, and spat into it.

"There," he concluded. "A serf's stew seasoned by a noble. Eat."

Lahure's eyes grew dark.

"No," he said calmly.

"When Lusignac turns cook, he does not want his dish spurned," Lusignac said, smilingly facing the mountaineer.

His lips straightened instantly, as he saw Lahure's eyes turn from deep blue to almost black, with tiny red lights behind. Guerin moved nearer. The sun, coming in at the only window, glistened on the gamekeeper's cuirass. Seconds went by.

Then Lahure made a sudden move. Lusignac, surprized by the other's speed, felt himself grasped by the leather belt that fastened his breast-plate at the waist, and by the loose folds of his jacket. He struggled with all his strength. He tried in vain to keep his feet.

"You have seasoned it, now taste of it," Lahure panted, and plunged the soldier's head into the pot.

The pot overturned, the table followed. And Lusignac, prone on the floor, clutched at his face, half-mad with pain. He heard a brief struggle as Guerin collided with Lahure, and shouts, as the soldiers outside ran up. He found out that his eyes were uninjured, as he had instinctively closed them. On the floor, Guerin sprawled, unconscious.

As for Lahure, he was not to be seen. The window was open. The crossbow was gone.

ONE of the men found flour, made a paste, which was spread over Lusignac's scalded hands and face. Guerin, who had been struck over the head, recovered consciousness. Beneath the window were found the tracks of Lahure's cord soles, imprinted in the moist soil.

And the party set out in pursuit.

The tracks, though not easily followed, at last led them to the shoulder of the mountain. On the opposite slope, the grass was thin and yellow, showing the bare earth as the mangy hair of a dog shows the naked hide beneath. A tall fir-pine that stood in the center of this open space, sent a long shadow pointing toward the east.

Guerin halted, and motioned for the rest to do likewise.

"He can be nowhere but behind that tree. He cannot escape. Beyond is a thirty-foot leap across a crevasse, called the Wolf's Leap. Wait until he shows himself, and Zebe can get him with a shaft."

"Good," Lusignac agreed.

He scattered his men in the undergrowth, and was glad to see them eager. Lahure had defied them many times, since their arrival, when still protected by his privilege.

The mountaineer appeared suddenly, his broad shoulders and long arms as unmistakable as the shape of the crossbow in his hands.

"Now—Zebe!" Lusignac shouted.

Zebe released his arrow, the string sang. Lahure fell flat on the ground, and the shaft passed him, high. Then he stood up. The crossbow vibrated, and Zebe cried out. The quarrel had broken his arm above the elbow. And all knew that Lahure had deliberately spared the archer's life. The missile could have been more easily directed at the unprotected breast above the pointed cuirass.

Zebe, almost weeping with pain, handed his bow to Lusignac.

"I'll not use it for some months," he said.

The captain turned to the others:

"What are you waiting for? Shoot!"

But Lahure was running toward the brink of the cliff, toward the Wolf's Leap. As he came to the edge, he held his arms high, gathered his legs beneath him, then leaped. His body appeared to hang still in the air. He fell, disappeared.

Lusignac and his men rushed forward.

Below gaped an abyss, hundreds of feet deep. Across, a full thirty feet, slightly lower than the ground upon which the castle men stood, was the rim of the opposite slope. It was as if the mountain had been cleft in two with a giant's sword. And, on the farther side, stood Lahure, who had done the impossible, had covered the distance in one tremendous leap.

Lusignac, recovering from his first surprize, slapped the nearest archer on the shoulder.

"Go ahead—feather him!"

But the man, a Breton, dropped his bow, knelt.

"What's the matter with thee?" Lusignac demanded, angrily.

"It is a miracle, captain. He is protected of the Saints. I cannot——"

Lusignac turned and looked at his men. He saw that they were all as impressed as the archer. He knew them too well to insist that they shoot. To them, the leap had been miraculous. As for himself, he abandoned the thought of picking up the bow. He knew that he would be no match for the other in an exchange of arrows. The mountaineer waited, scorning to flee, confident that he could beat any man to the shot.

Lusignac raged, but words were all he could command.

"Surrender now, and I will give thee naught but a lashing. Wait until thou art caught, and I'll hang thee by the heels, with a fire to keep thee warm."

Lahure laughed loudly:

"There are men in the mountains to help me, who would not taste the seasoning you offer. Go, before I finish what I started."

Lusignac looked shamefacedly at his men.

"Peace for today," he agreed. "We'll meet again."

* * *

LUSIGNAC found Bertrand de Baucy before the huge fireplace in the castle hall.

The baron was conversing with a clerk, who held voluminous rolls of parchment. The immense room, with the stained glass windows tracing multicolored patterns on the board floor, seemed interminable to the captain, under the curious glances of the servants. The menials bit their lips, and stared with pretended interest at the heavy rafters crossing above, or into the flickering flames. Lusignac knew he cut a ridiculous figure, with his face plastered with hardened flour paste. And when the episode became known, the laughter would increase. An armed soldier, not long returned from wars, disfigured by a poacher's stew!

"Well, Lusignac!" de Baucy shouted. "Fixed like a fish for the broiling, eh?"

Lusignac laughed with simulated ease.

"Nearer the truth than you think, my lord, but in this instance, I was cooked first, and dressed after."

"I'll hear about it at meal time, my friend," de Baucy went on. "But I have something important to tell thee." He took one of the rolls from the clerk's hands. "Miron has gathered these documents for me. They were left after my father's death. I don't understand such things myself, but I am told that this grants the Lahure family the privilege of the hunt for all time. So that——"

"Forgive me, my lord," Lusignac interrupted swiftly. "But you ordered me to bring him to terms and revoke his privilege."

"True enough. But I did not then know that the privilege was not revokable. For nothing on earth would I go against my father's wish."

"I have this very day informed Lahure that he should leave the mountains, that it was your wish."

De Baucy shrugged.

"Then, thou mayst send a man to inform him that it is my pleasure that he should stay, and hunt as he desires. Nothing that has been done with words but can be undone with more words. 'Tis not like a sword blow, which, once given, cannot be taken back."

Lusignac grinned sheepishly.

"He refused flatly to obey your orders in any case," he said.

"Refused?" the baron's face darkened, then he broke into a smile. "That's my mountain people for thee, Lusignac! They will not take injustice, even from the mighty!"

"Then, you forgive him?" Lusignac said, standing up.

"Yes. Should I quarrel with a man like Lahure? He is a child!"

"Then, my lord, I renounce your service, and will go back to Guyenne immediately."

De Baucy held up his hands in protest.

"——! Why?"

Lusignac narrated the incident in the hut. From his relation it appeared that Lahure had been insolent from the first, that the conflict had developed through the poacher's own fault.

De Baucy, who had known Lusignac many years, as a true friend and a brave soldier, became indignant.

"And he burned thy face, eh?" He threw down the parchment he held in his hand, stamped upon it. "Then, though he shall keep his right of hunt, he'll pay for something else!" He came close to Lusignac, laid a hand on the captain's shoulder. "Thou shalt see, de Lusignac, that thy quarrel is mine. From what I hear, this Lahure is popular among the peasants, and anything done against him will cause resentment. But his impudence has carried him too far. How didst thou and thy men permit his escape?"

Lusignac told of the pursuit that ended at the Wolf's Leap. De Baucy, who recalled the chasm from his childhood trips in the mountains, shook his head unbelievingly.

"A man cannot do it," he asserted. "He must know a trail, a short cut, and thus have deceived all."

"I saw him, with these eyes, leaping."

De Baucy moved about thoughtfully.

"If it were any one but thee whom he had harmed and insulted, I would let him go. He deserves pardon after a feat like that."

"He has stronger, more supple sinews than other men, that is all," Lusignac pointed out. "There was no miracle. As for me, whether by your orders, or privately, I will have no peace until I burn his face in return, with interest. Think you it is pleasant to feel burning stew on one's cheeks?"

De Baucy frowned.

"Listen, Lusignac; I myself will capture Lahure. Then thou mayst hang him, or cut his throat. But as for torturing him, and going thyself to claim him, it is out of the question. Thou art a stranger. Things will be accepted from me which would bring the peasants down about your ears."

"I fear not—" Lusignac remarked.

"Since my father's death, and while I was away, the people have tasted freedom, and it is too early to arouse them."

"Bah, they are cattle——"

"But sometimes fight. Hast thou never heard of Gaudry, Bishop of Laon? The mob caught him in his own castle, after he had abused his power, and his brain was spilled with an ax blow."

"A churchman——"

"A soldier as well. And that was near a hundred years gone, when times were better for our nobles. It is wise to be careful."

"Very well," agreed Lusignac.

De Baucy turned to Miron, the clerk, who had waited just out of hearing during the conversation.

"Go, and tell the priest down in the village to proclaim that Lahure is an outcast, and that a reward will be paid for him at the castle."

Miron shuffled uneasily.

"Why dost thou wait?" de Baucy demanded sharply.

"No one will see with favor Lahure punished for hurt done upon a soldier not of this country," Miron said, boldly enough. "Your father, my lord, was just."

De Baucy was not over patient. He who, a few seconds before, had recommended leniency, forgot his words. His brown hand slashed out, and the elderly man tumbled back.

"If there be talk against me, it will not be within my hearing," he said coldly. "Go." Then he turned to Lusignac. "Talkative old man. Too privileged in my father's time. I may talk leniency, I may pardon, but I will not have it demanded."

"Good speech!" Lusignac approved enthusiastically. "I thought my lord had changed when he spoke of fear of the peasants."

"The time has not yet come to fear them," the baron concluded, unaware of his prophecy.

"Nor ever will come," Lusignac added.

And they sat down to eat.

DE BAUCY had been trained in a school that did not allow of delay. The next morning, he gathered sixty men at arms and set out after Lahure. Lusignac, who had been vain of his good looks, was chiefly concerned with his face. He had summoned a famous leech from a nearby town, who was reputed to heal by touch. In his lord's absence, he was to command at the castle.

This time, there was no pretense at a peaceful errand. The men were armed as for war, with lances, swords, bows, and heavier armor than worn the previous day. De Baucy was clad in a scintillating suit of steel and, behind him, a squire carried his battle helmet, dented in places by blows of simitars received in the East. The azure pennon of the de Baucy fluttered at the end of a staff.

The men, both those who had formed the garrison of the castle and those who had come back with the baron from the Norman wars, were jubilant. The life of the castle was dull, an uneventful routine. Here was an occasion to go man hunting, with very little danger, they figured, a business preferable to fighting the Emperor Otho's trained infantry, or the Saracens, who were even mightier fighters.

Guerin alone was uneasy. He realized how difficult it would be to corner Lahure in his own mountains.

The party entered the single street of the first village, and halted before the church, where de Baucy questioned the old priest concerning the state of affairs, the prospects of the crop, and cleverly sought information as to Lahure's whereabouts. As he leaned over in conversation, Miron, the clerk, appeared at the door of the church, then descended the steps. The elderly scribe was pale, but resolute.

He grasped de Baucy's bridle, and pulled the horse around, pointing to the trail leading back to the castle.

"Strike me again, my lord, if it pleases you," he said. "But take warning and go back."

"Warning?"

"The young men have joined Lahure, and will resist."

"Resist me? Let them try," de Baucy said, grimly. "They will see that fighting the game-guards and resisting their lord are different pastimes. Let go."

But Miron was stubborn, and protested again.

With a smile, the baron threw him aside, and urged his horse through the crowd of older peasants who were standing some distance away.

"Come, men!" he called to the troop. On the highway once more, he summoned Guerin to his side. "Where is the *Val d'Enfer?*" (Hell's Valley) he asked.

"In the eastern mountain, my lord."

"Can one arrive there with horses?"

"No."

"Then we will dismount when needed, and attack on foot. The priest said that was where Lahure and his followers gather."

The villages along the road reported the same location. The calmer men, those who were devoted to peace, said that their more truculent fellow citizens had joined the mountaineer, and were disposed to match blow with blow.

"It might be wiser to go back and get more men," Guerin suggested. "Lahure has near two hundred men, all young and strong, who can wield scythes and sticks, and may have crossbows."

"Keep thy peace, Guerin. Were I alone, I would not turn back. I must either crush the fools now, or forever consult them in what I do."

Guerin cast an uneasy glance behind him.

"These men are not from the mountains," Guerin explained. "And their worth is uncertain should bad weather come, as seems likely."

He indicated the sky. Black clouds were gathered together in an immense tumulus, and it was noticeably darker than it had been a few moments before. There was every appearance of a coming thunderstorm.

"It will be night before we reach the *Val d'Enfer*," Guerin insisted, "and the storm will hinder us."

"That is the manner Lahure will reason," de Baucy said. "And, for that belief, he will not guard himself carefully. We will go down in the rain and darkness and surprize him."

"Yes, my lord," Guerin agreed, diplomatically.

De Baucy, more annoyed than he would admit by the turn of events, chatted to Guerin as he would have done to a more worthy listener, explaining his reasons for striking an immediate blow. The *Val d'Enfer* could be entered by but one trail. It was a sort of gigantic well, pitted in the flank of the mountain, the bottom covered with fir-pines. The sides were impossible to scale, except in one place, a narrow pathway descending steeply between the boulders of the southern slope. The poacher and his partisans, with crossbows, could hold the position against any number of men in the daytime.

To starve them out, as Guerin suggested, would take too long, and would create the rumor that he, Bertrand de Baucy, belted knight and one time Crusader, had feared to attack his rebellious people, trusting to hunger rather than to strength of arms. The storm, instead of mitigating against the force from the castle, was on the contrary a help from Heaven, allowing the possibility of a night attack.

Guerin nodded disconsolately. Who was he to offer suggestions to this knight, who had held high command in the Holy Land, who had fought on many stricken fields? In all likelihood, the plan would succeed. But the mountains at night, and in a storm——

"LEAVE the horses here," Guerin said.

It appeared that Fate was on the side of de Baucy. The threatening storm held off. Guerin had captured a watcher set by Lahure. The man, frightened out of his wits by the presence of his master, babbled all he knew. He and another had been the only sentries posted outside the valley. The other sentry was on guard at the entrance to the trail.

His obedience and willingness to give information did not serve him. De Baucy, born and bred to the belief that his race was supreme and should brook no resistance from lower people, angered beyond control by the rebellion, and, most of all, afraid to appear as worried as he felt, ordered the sentry's death. The man was hanged from a tree-limb, and, as they proceeded, the party could see the dark shape silhouetted grotesquely against the sky. The deed once done, de Baucy regretted his hasty action, but no one could put the breath of life back into the strangled body.

At Guerin's announcement, he dismounted.

"Five men to guard the horses," he said, and, with skilled eyes he picked out the men who felt frightened or ill, to be left behind.

Then, he stripped off his heavy armor, armlets, thigh pieces and corselet, donned an archer's light steel cap, exchanged his long, broad sword for a shorter weapon, easier to wield.

"Go thou ahead, Guerin, and pluck me that sentry from his place," he ordered.

Guerin hesitated.

"Is he also to be killed?"

De Baucy saw that to grant one man's life after taking that of another, would be an admission of wrong done in the first place.

"Yes," he said.

Some one spoke in the ranks, unwittingly loud.

"An ill omen, that swinging corpse was. And now, another."

The knight whirled quickly, scanned the faces. But the man who had spoken succeeded in concealing his dismay, and could not be picked out. Moreover, this was neither the time nor the place to antagonize his men.

"Let the man who talked act well," he contented himself with saying.

Guerin went ahead, on his errand, and the rest followed at a considerable distance. Night fell completely. The thick clouds blanketed the stars, and the darkness was absolute. But Guerin evidently had no trouble finding his way.

De Baucy felt a hand on his arm; a faint glint of steel. He heard the gamekeeper's voice:

"The trail is free, my lord."

"Good. Thou'lt be rewarded, lead on."

Followed a march over stony soil. The brink of the *Val d'Enfer* was reached. The knight was for starting down immediately, but Guerin declared that it was best to await the breaking of the storm. Thus, any dislodged stone would not be noticed below, the pattering rain would cover the noise of the descent.

"Well put," de Baucy acknowledged. "We will wait."

About ten o'clock the first peal of thunder resounded. The storm broke, furiously. The rain, driven before the wind, swept down horizontally, and brushed against the ground with the sound of a cataract. The thunder resounded, as if a cyclopic iron drum was being beaten in the immense, echoing vault of the sky.

Bertrand de Baucy felt the water trickle from the polished helmet to his neck, and seep down within his jacket between his shoulder blades. Although it was summer, the drops were ice cold. He shuddered, then smiled. Who would expect an attack in weather such as this? He shouted to Guerin, and his voice, muffled by the downpour, was scarcely audible to himself.

The party might make as much noise as they chose, the rebels down in the valley would not hear. Boulders, detached from the slope by the force of the rain were heard as a faint rumble. A flash of lightning revealed for a fraction of a second the steel breast-plates of his men, and their dripping faces. No fear there, Bertrand noticed. Resolution, unemotional resolution.

"Thou shalt lead," he informed the gamekeeper, when the later was close to his side.

"My lord, the way is insecure. True, the rain will conceal us, but it will also make the descent dangerous, slippery. It would be wise to wait."

"Thou art afraid to lead. I will go ahead," de Baucy replied. "Follow within hailing distance of me, and have the men so disposed that, at all times, they will be within speaking distance of the one ahead and the one following. Come."

He stepped over the edge of the trail, which fell beneath the level of the ground like a step. And, immediately, although his eyes could discern nothing, he had the impression of the pit sinking below him.

"Stay—" he began.

"My lord will turn back?" Guerin asked, hopefully.

Now that Guerin had guessed his intention, de Baucy's brave and stubborn nature would not permit him to retreat.

"No. Tell the men that he who wishes, may drop out. A frightened man could compromise everything."

The word was passed along the line, that whoever desired could remain behind without fear of punishment. The answer traveled back to the leader; unanimous support. The soldiers, too, had their standards and pride. De Baucy took the second step, the third. He was cautious, not risking his weight until he had carefully tested the foothold. His hands clutched at the wet, smooth surface of the rocks, and his muscles were tensed. Occasionally he reached up to touch Guerin on the leg, to make sure that he was there. He felt that he might turn craven were he suddenly to find himself alone.

A rattle, a faint cry, and he stopped short, listening, his heart beating rapidly.

"What is it?" he called out.

Guerin's voice came from above, fragments of words.

"—ard—fallen—be careful!"

Buchard, no doubt, a man who had been with de Baucy ever since he wore spurs! What an inglorious death for a soldier! But he had passed out of life doing his duty, and the end was identical, whether one lost existence quelling rebellious peasants or combating warriors. What if he, de Baucy should fall and die? Was it not stupid to risk one of the best lances in France on such a puerile chase?

"The wine is poured. It must be drunk," he quoted.

And went on.

At times, when the lightning forked across the night, he glanced upward, and saw his followers strung out on the flank of the descent. He wondered if the peasants could see also. Then he reasoned that the distance was too great, the rain too confusing. And should they see, uncertain crossbow shooting would avail them little.

He slipped. He had a sensation of falling. He slid on his stomach for some yards. Then, his hand caught a root. Shivering with emotion, he waited for Guerin.

The gamekeeper brought his lips close to his master's ear.

"Two others have fallen," he said.

The trail cris-crossed widely on the flank of the mountain, which was fortunate, as otherwise, a falling man would have dragged others with him.

"How far down are we?" de Baucy asked.

"But a short way, my lord, perhaps one-fourth of the distance."

"So little?"

"Yes. I estimated by that large bush we just passed."

De Baucy had believed himself close to the floor of the valley. He became aware that his endurance would indeed be tested before the end of the journey. Again, he had a foreboding that he had best retrace his steps. He was now completely drenched, and it was certain that he would be ill from the effect. A recurrent fever, first contracted during an epidemic in camp, was very easily brought back. But he set his teeth, and proceeded. His savage nature was further aroused against Lahure and his followers.

"My lord——"

"What is it, now?"

"One of the men has lost his nerve, and dares not move from his secure footing. He holds up the line."

De Baucy swore.

"Let the rest pass over him," he ordered.

"They cannot. They tried."

"Can I pass thee and the others between here and he?"

"Yes. The trail is wide enough."

"Hold tight, then. I'm going back."

Grasping Guerin's arms, he squeezed his body by, and into the comparatively free-way beyond. He was compelled to repeat this maneuver again and again, for he knew he must reach the laggard, or nothing would be done. At last, he was at the man's side.

"Come! Thou seest where I am. 'Tis but a long step."

The other recognized the voice.

"My lord, I cannot see! I dare not move."

A terrific flash and an ear-splitting detonation. De Baucy saw horror on the man's face. He had doubtless looked down. All was dark once more.

"Come!" de Baucy said, grasping the man by the arm.

The frightened soldier pulled his hand free, and nearly pitched the leader into the abyss. Ruthlessly, de Baucy took the only course left him. He reached up, grasped the fellow's shoulder, and hurled him down.

"The road is clear!" he announced. "Follow."

Helped by the lightning, he made his way back to the lead.

The descent was resumed.

He was suddenly dazed by a vivid flash, and he fell back against the rocks, stunned. It was some moments before he recovered and was able to go on. Other peals succeeded one another, near by, it seemed.

"Strange," muttered de Baucy. "They seem quite near, yet I saw no lightning. These mountains are peculiar."

But he kept on, cautiously feeling his way, step by step.

AT SUNRISE, the next morning, the peasant's camp stirred to life.

The rain had ceased before dawn, and the sudden stillness after the gale was bewildering. It seemed that nature had but paused to rest, and at any moment the storm would resume.

Lahure gathered his followers, and after the usual morning prayer, addressed them.

"Comrades, I am grateful to my friends who have come to help me. But it is wrong for one man to cause many deaths. Those of you who are unmarried and have no relatives are welcome. But others must go back. There is yet time."

After an irresolute silence, one of the peasants spoke up.

"Sooner or later, we must come to blows with the castle guards. Why not now?"

"Encounter with the soldiers can end in but one way," Lahure declared, frankly. "That is, our defeat. Even if we beat de Baucy's men, others will come, led by their lords, for in fighting us, the nobles would fight their own battle. The time is not ripe for the poor man to face the rich with weapons in his hands. It may never come. Those of you who have others depending upon them, should feel no shame, but pride, in withdrawing from a venture that has no possibility of success. To give up the right of fighting for a just cause is sometimes harder than the battle itself. As for me, I have no thought of avoiding my fate. Sooner or later, I will be caught—hanged. But before that time, I shall live a free man. I repeat, unattached men only may stay with me."

"He's right," came the agreement.

"We will accompany those who go back to the trail," Lahure went on, "and bid them farewell."

The mountaineers stood bareheaded, and sang together. Deprived of other means of expression, their sentiments were voiced in crudely composed songs, to the tune of church hymns. Then the group set out for the foot of the trail, where the final leave-taking would occur. When they came out of the fir-pines into an open space, a shout went up—

"The soldiers!"

Before them, along the first ridge, were lined fifty armed men, breast-plated, steel-helmeted, bearing on their chests the black *Chimera* of de Baucy. And conspicuous, his back to a tree, stood Lord Bertrand, short sword in hand.

"Surrender!" he challenged.

Lahure took in the situation at a glance. Fifty organized men against two hundred peasants—the odds were too great.

"I will surrender, my lord," he said. "Provided the others go free. They have done no harm as yet."

"All will lay down their arms and be tied together. And all shall be punished," de Baucy insisted, although it was evident that the gamekeeper, Guerin, who was at his side, advised leniency.

Lahure wondered at this. Then, as he looked closer at the enemy, the reasons became evident. The mercenaries were haggard, unnerved. Their bows were useless, or practically so, the strings wetted by the rain. Lahure's own men had kept their crossbows covered during the night. He whispered the information, and the peasants took heart. The weapons were wound up, bolts slipped into place.

"Withdraw, my lord," Lahure said, "for no one will surrender."

De Baucy raised his sword.

"Forward!" he ordered.

The soldiers hesitated, then advanced slowly. Immediately, missiles came from the crossbows.

At the short distance, the powerful short arrows tore through the thin steel of the breast-plates. Guerin, struck in the forehead, went down. Others fell. And the soldiers turned—and ran. They gained the trail, and hurried up, followed by the bolts of their opponents.

Lahure lifted his hand.

"They flee!" he cried.

"Who flees?" screamed de Baucy. "Who flees?"

"He must be mad," Lahure thought, but replied aloud: "Your soldiers, my lord."

"Come on, peasants, kill me!" de Baucy shouted, swinging his blade around his head.

The peasants hesitated, then approached him cautiously, some taking aim with the crossbows. Lahure looked keenly at the knight, then motioned for his followers to halt. He circled silently around. De Baucy still stared straight ahead.

The lord was blind!

LAHURE crept closer, then suddenly lunged forward, grasped the sword, and tore it from de Baucy's hand. Bertrand, his face twisted with shame and rage, shouted hoarsely for them to finish him. There were but three among the peasants who were ready to take him at his word. But Lahure halted them.

"Peace!" he urged. "My lord is blind!" And still grasping the sword, he covered de Baucy with his own great frame. "God has taken his sight, and he is sacred."

De Baucy's defiance suddenly left him. He sank down, his face in his gauntleted hands, and sobbed. Those watching him marveled at the spectacle; a noble, weeping before lowly people.

"The lightning, Lahure—the lightning," he said.

Lahure bent, and took de Baucy's hand in his own strong fingers. The sense of loyalty, inborn in him through generations, was awakened. "Sometimes, men so blinded regain their sight. Be of good cheer, my lord. You must return to the castle."

"I hold myself captive, rescue or no rescue. Thou canst claim ransom."

"Get back thy privilege, Lahure, and our rights. No taxes for a year!" shouted the peasants.

Lahure hesitated, but for a moment. He acknowledged to the blind man what he would have refused the warrior—allegiance.

"De Baucy is our lord, and is ill. He shall go back as he wills, without conditions." And to still further protests, he added, "I say this, Lahure, whose father served his father."

But he had reckoned without the anger of the population, an anger accumulated against de Baucy since his return from the wars.

"Let him go, Lahure, let him go! But before he gets back with his blind eyes, one of us will shaft him with a crossbow."

"No harm shall be done to him!"

This was greeted with a laugh. Lahure, defiant, faced them all.

"I'll go with him, and no hurt shall be done," he said.

AT THE first village, Lahure demanded and obtained a wagon. De Baucy was now in a high fever, both from his old sickness and the shock. Throughout the long journey, Lahure kept a careful watch, his crossbow ready. The news that Lord de Baucy was blinded, ill, traveling without guards, had spread around the region with surprizing rapidity. But the peasant's resolute bearing protected the knight. On the way, they passed the bodies of two soldiers, which plainly showed that the inhabitants were up in arms against the mercenaries imported by de Baucy.

At length he reached the moat before the outer walls. The bridge was raised. News of the disaster to the expedition had evidently traveled back with the fugitives. There was prolonged parley, and it was not until Lusignac himself came out, that the stout planking rattled into place, and the wagon was allowed to enter the courtyard. The heavy door slammed shut.

Lusignac, his hands on his hips, stood before Lahure, laughing.

"Straight into my hands, poacher!" he exclaimed.

Lahure shrugged.

"I came on a peaceful errand, and I will be allowed to depart. Lord de Baucy is here, sick and blinded."

Lusignac gave a start of surprize, made sure of Lahure's statement, ordered the sick man carried to bed, and the leech to be sent to his bedside.

"Now, I'll go," Lahure said.

Lusignac laughed again: "Mistaken, thou art. Thoult stay."

"Is this the reward for saving my lord?"

Lusignac opened his belt pocket, brought out a bag, which he threw to Lahure, who mechanically caught it.

"There's gold to pay thee for the service thou hast done. My Lord de Baucy pays for services, but accepts no favors from thy breed."

"But, if I am to stay, what payment is the gold?"

"To purchase a perpetual mass for the rest of thy soul," Lusignac said. "In the meanwhile, thy crossbow!"

Lahure bowled over the first man who reached for the weapon. But no man may cope with twenty, and he was overwhelmed, thrown to the ground, half stunned by the blows rained upon him while his arms were held.

Miron, who had returned to the castle, protested, even joined in the struggle in an attempt to help the mountaineer. Lusignac threw him aside roughly. When Lahure was securely bound, Lusignac came near and playfully tugged his hair.

"We meet again," he said. The captain's face was still swathed in bandages. "My master may forgive thy rebellion, but I have a right to avenge the insult given me. No one will deny me that."

"It is indeed worthy of *thee*, captain, to have me hanged. For, did it come to fair blows, *thou* wouldst certainly get the worst of it, belted knight, and cross-wearer though *thou* art."

Thou was applied to inferiors or equals. De Baucy addressed Lusignac as *thou*, but he was the only one permitted to do so. Lusignac flushed at the intended insult. Then he became good-humored again. His face split into a distorted grin.

"By heaven!" he exclaimed. "I have an idea. Thou speakest as an equal. Instead of hanging thee, I will fight thee. Shouldst thou best me, thou art free."

The soldiers approved noisily.

"Hail, captain, make him eat dust!"

"But—" Lusignac added— "thou't fight me with knightly weapons, lance against lance, steel against steel. When one raises oneself to another's rank, he must be willing to take the consequences!"

"A crossbow is my weapon," Lahure said.

"Will I use a bow? No. Sword and lance it is to be."

"He may claim a champion to defend him, if this be a judiciary duel," said the clerk, Miron, who knew the rules of chivalry.

"True," Lusignac agreed. "But who will take his side? He has no noble friends."

"Were de Baucy well, thou wouldst not dare what will be done," Lahure said.

"Perhaps not," Lusignac agreed. "But he is not well, and I am master here. And I will not stay on long after I have settled with thee. A blind man's service holds little glory. When de Baucy recovers, Lusignac will be gone."

"Demand twenty-four hours to secure a champion," urged Miron.

"The demand is granted before the asking," Lusignac said. "Tomorrow, at noon time, gather here and see the poacher fight with his better. Let the matter be heralded over the district this day, so that any one who wants to fight this serf's battle may do so. And now, Lahure, to jail with thee until it is time to mount thy horse."

The soldiers laughed loudly, and Lahure was led to the jail.

AT NOON on the next day, the entire population of the castle, save de Baucy, who was still delirious, gathered in the courtyard. The soldiers were anxious to see Lahure get his punishment, for he was the leader of the men who had slain some thirty of their comrades during the retreat from *Val d'Enfer*. A page, who had seen Lahure make his choice of armor, reported the amusing episode.

Among the new armors, not one had been large enough to fit Lahure's chest, and he had been compelled to chose an old suit of mail and a pot helmet. His manner of handling edged weapons was ludicrous. Lusignac had a reputation for horsemanship, and skill with the lance. Lahure, it was known, was not even a horseman. The conflict could end in but one way.

When Lahure appeared, clad in the rusty mail, an ironical ovation greeted him. The soldiers jokingly made bets on him.

Lusignac, clad in a shining suit, with a crested helmet, followed him. Then the two separated, each going to his own mount. Lusignac made the saddle with ease, in spite of the weight of his plates. Lahure had to be helped up by three or four men.

It was realized that Lusignac did not wish to push the pleasantry too far, beyond the bounds of decency. There were to be no heralding of titles, and the encounter would start upon a given signal.

Lahure was briefly instructed how to rest his lance, how to present his shield, by one of the self-appointed squires. Then the word was given.

Unsteady in the saddle, handling his long weapon awkwardly, Lahure ambled his horse forward. Lusignac sped like a thunder-bolt. Lahure's lance thrust wide. Lusignac's point struck the shield squarely. Lahure was lifted off his horse by the shock, sent into the air.

The crowd laughed.

The hunter turned over as he fell, landed on his shield, lay where he fell, face down, in a cloud of dust. Lusignac dismounted and ran forward, unsheathing his sword. But the prostrate man did not stir. Two men, summoned hurriedly, cut the laces of the helmet, and lifted him to a sitting position. His head fell back, and his blood-covered face was revealed. A rapid examination showed that he was merely stunned, his nose bruised.

Lusignac, who apparently realized the unworthiness of the comedy, turned away with a brief word—

"Hang him."

There were those in the crowd who had been won by Lahure's fearlessness, his scorn of ridicule.

"Shame!" some one shouted, and others took up the cry.

It is doubtful what Lusignac would have decided. Before he could speak, the drawbridge creaked, lowered, and Miron appeared. Behind him, on a great white horse, rode a man in armor.

The newcomer was stalwart. On his helmet glinted a gold coronet. But his shield was of polished steel, bare of any distinguishing emblem. He said nothing, but took his place at the spot where Lahure had stood before the brief engagement. His visor was lowered, his face hidden, but he evidenced absolute calm.

Miron, who had taken upon himself the duty of herald, shouted—

"A champion! A champion!"

Lusignac, who had raised his visor, was seen to smile. Surely, after the encounter of a moment before, he was happy to have the opportunity to show that he could fight in earnest, as well as in jest. He did not ask for the stranger's name, obviously heedless. The soldiers knew that out of every twenty men Lusignac had met, he had defeated nineteen, and looked for a quick victory by the captain.

Lusignac mounted again, lowered his visor.

"Ready," he said.

The crowd pressed closer. This was an unexpected treat. The identity of the champion was in question. Who, in the region, would take up a peasant's cause? Could this be but another masquerade?

The signal, a clattering of hoofs, the sharp sound of splintering lances, and both riders were still in the saddle. One course, without result. Attendants came rushing up with new weapons, but Lusignac waved them aside, and upon the stranger's gestured agreement, side-arms were resorted to.

Lusignac drew his long sword, hung his shield to the pommel of his saddle. The other unhooked from beneath him a heavy steel mace, a long-handled weapon, terminating in a knob-studded ball. The sight of these preparations sent the spectators into a frenzy. Bets were laid for and against the mace, which had many partisans as a close-combat weapon.

Lusignac was plainly worried. The one course with the lances had probably convinced him that he faced a man skilled in the use of knightly weapons. Moreover, he perhaps dreaded the mace, for all men knew that he who wields a mace against a long sword must be certain of his ability to land a blow.

"*Allez!*"

Lusignac rushed, his sword straight ahead, forming of his arm and long blade a sort of lance. The stranger had started at a slower pace, and seemed to falter. He swerved his horse broad-side to Lusignac, presenting the flank.

"Craven!" shouted one of the soldiers. "He avoids the shock!"

But the stranger completed his maneuver, brought his mount forward at a gallop, now on Lusignac's left side. Bewildered by this daring maneuver, the captain hesitated a second between shifting his sword to the left hand, or twisting in the saddle to strike. He hesitated too long. The challenger, following his plan, was upon him. His hand flashed to the captain's shoulder-piece, Lusignac was flung down across the stranger's saddle. His sword went clattering out of his hand. The mace rose and fell, blows ringing out like a blacksmith's hammer on an anvil, on the beaten man's back, shoulders, and head. Then, satisfied that he was *hors de combat*, the unknown knight flung his opponent to the ground.

The crowd rushed to Lusignac. His squire removed the helmet. The eyes were wide, lusterless. Two streams of blood seeped from the nostrils, and stained the bandage on the face.

"Dead," said some one.

LAHURE recovered in time to witness Lusignac's defeat.

"Who is the knight?" he asked Miron.

Without replying directly, Miron stood before the assembly, cleared his throat importantly.

"Guillaume des Barres!" he proclaimed. "Lord of Oissery, Forfry, Saint-Pathus, Ogives, Gondreville and Ferte-Alais!"

Cheers sounded. Guillaume des Barres, the best lance of the age, the hero of the third Crusade, of Bouvines, of fifty battles and twenty sieges! He who had twice stretched Richard the Lion-Heart, King of England and Aquitaine, in the tournaments at the camp before Acre. No wonder Lusignac had gone down!

Lahure touched Miron on the elbow.

"I must thank him," he said.

Miron shook his head.

"No. He doesn't know that he fought for thee. I merely informed him that Lusignac had cast a defiance to all for this day. Lord des Barres is traveling to accomplish a vow, and was glad of the opportunity to perform."

"Nevertheless, I shall thank him," Lahure said. "My cause was just, and he fights for the right, does he not?"

"As thou wilt," Miron said with a shrug.

Des Barres had removed his helmet, and called for a pot of wine. He drank in long swallows, holding the pewter container with both hands. Lahure noticed that his hair was almost white, his neck gaunt. Des Barres was nearer to sixty than fifty, but fought like a young man.

Lahure approached, bent one knee.

"I humbly thank you, my lord."

Des Barres looked at him for a moment.

"Oh, was it thy quarrel I fought, my man? A petty cause, in truth," and he turned his head away, to finish his wine.

Later, he dismounted, and entered the castle, to visit the master.

Lahure approached Lusignac's body, looked down in the sunburned, still face.

"A bad knight," Miron remarked.

"The other was no better," Lahure said stolidly. "Hero though he be."

The love of fighting had impelled Lusignac to quarrel with him. The love of fighting had caused Bertrand de Baucy's foolhardy move down the trail in the thunder-storm. And Guillaume des Barres had had no other urge in his encounter with the captain. And Lahure, whose indignation had been deep, suddenly understood, compared that passion with his own for the hunt. Each man to his own game. Was one to be blamed more than another?

He turned to thank Miron, found the clerk gone. A soldier offered him his crossbow.

"Thy weapon. Thou art free."

Lahure took his piece, and walked to the draw-bridge. As he reached the open, Miron ran to him from the hall door.

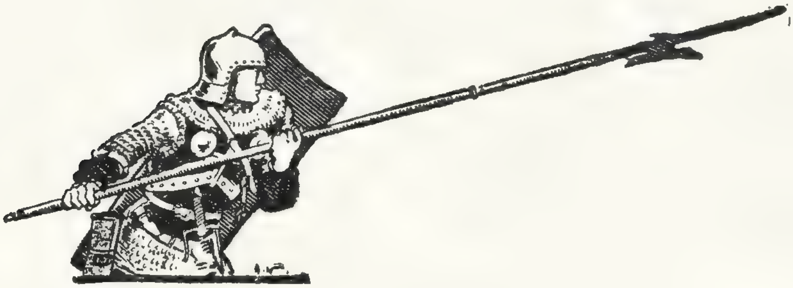
"Taxes lifted for a year all around!" he said. "Lord de Baucy so vows in the hope of regaining his sight. And thy privilege is acknowledged."

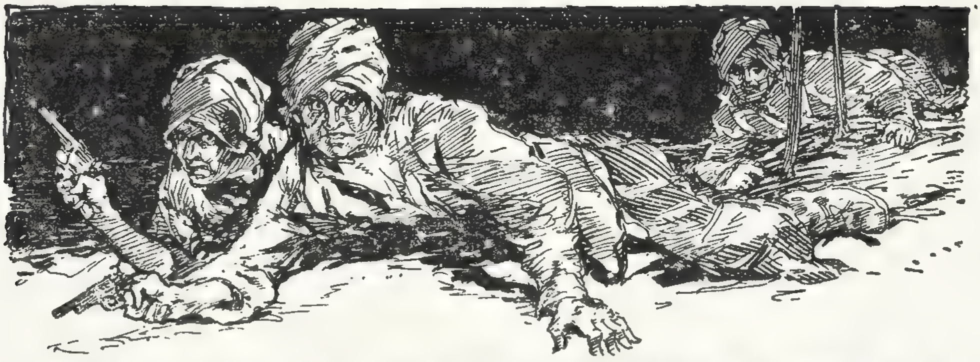
"Thank you all," said Lahure.

He took the trail to his mountain home. He reached the open space, where he had stood at twilight four days before. He stared long at the castle. Of the leaders, one was blind, the other dead. He, Lahure, was free.

A sudden thought came to him. He took the bag of gold given him by Lusignac on the previous afternoon, opened it and held the shining coins in his palm. With the amount, he could seek fortune elsewhere, go to the cities, become an armorer. There was need for men of his skill.

He looked again at the mountains, then threw the gold into the grass.





THE VALLEY OF REMORSE

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE by Bruce Johns

Author of "Evens Up," "The Fox of St. John's," etc.

WHO was he?

Where had he come from so suddenly with his convoy of educated Hindus and his wealth and his aloofness?

He was the talk of the town, the first sensational mystery it had been the pleasure of little Dos Daros to thrill over. He came in once a week from that fool's paradise of his, five miles outside of the last irrigation ditch always with a dark-faced bodyguard, a handsome, tall figure, riding a horse that was the envy of every rancher in Miraculo Valley and offering us only an unwinking stare from unfriendly eyes under his pith helmet.

Prominence—almost notoriety in that small town—had come first when he demanded of "Frenchy" Briere, druggist and soda dispenser, a concoction to preserve old clothes.

"It is old laces and silks," he had explained. "There is so much sand-dust in your beastly valley."

And there were no women out there on his ranch. We knew that. It was the first thing a town like Dos Daros would know. And as for his own clothes, there he was dressed in togs that would not shame the highest officer of the king's regiments in India.

He was English. There was no denying his speech.

He was a soldier. There was no denying his straight back, his faultless attire, his sharp commands. Only his gray, thinning hair told he was past the prime of life.

We had talked much about that request to the druggist. He had gone away with a curt nod that showed plainly he was not really disappointed because he had not expected to find it anyway. We wondered and conjectured—and thought once more of beer that we were too lazy to cross the street to get.

But he remained on the tongue of every man, woman and child. We were discussing him then, there under the eaves of the little adobe county jail and sheriff's quarters where we had sought our usual shelter from the daily barrage the sun was putting down into the great soup bowl valley.

"He never does ast nobody to his place; he's only got Hindu help; he's got a lotta dough but no crops," Sheriff Euphray Payne was saying. "Sir, I don't like him, not a bit!"

"What about ol' man Diggan's yap about his dorg bein' kilt by that thar fence? 'Lectric charged, he was a-yellin'," interrupted "Baldy" Fainer.

Fainer ran more cattle over his cantaloup leavings than any man in the valley.

"Baldy's afraid of his cattle," claimed Lawrence Hentry, putting back a galley proof of the *Weekly Argus* in his hip pocket. "Lot of bunk being spilled about this fellow."

"Hippo" Jones, the only paid deputy sheriff in the county, smiled.

"One o' 'em slick English crooks I read about t'other day in a mageezine, I betcha, mebbe."

His keen eyes had a laugh in them as he turned to me and winked.

"Well," came the mild voice of the sheriff, "don't make no diff what you-alls think about it. Me and Hippo's goin' out some night and see what Joe Diggan's yap was all 'bout."

"When?" I shouted.

"None o' your —— business," chuckled Payne, "but for one beer mebbe——"

We did stop occasionally to think of our beer. It was our only real recreation—besides just sitting—to think of it for a long time and then go have one. We always were craving beaded refreshment, quart glasses of it, the kind that left your nose and mustache coated with suds.

It was 101 degrees under the eaves, 103 under the gaunt eucalyptus across the dust road over Bert Gomez' saloon, and only the —— himself or some Mexican *mozo* knew what itwas under the desert sky beyond that.

It was, paradoxically, the land of agricultural miracle and the antechamber of —— where you needed no password. Miraculo Valley was a pocket in the southwest corner of California, a mushroom frontier of the nation then—1905—a wild, luscious garden transformed from desert by an army of some twenty thousand peons who had poured in the Colorado River under the skilful brains of great American engineers. Land that man forgot—not God!

I look back now almost twenty years into those faces again, but the drama that we were to go through has etched into my memory a history of them that I can not deny a writing.

In the first place Euphray Payne was simply there. He had been for forty-five years. A deputy sheriff for eighteen years, he had spent his time guarding the peace of less than a score of persons. Now he was enjoying his second term as sheriff of the recently formed county. He was leather-faced, white of hair, and so rawboned that his two guns, carelessly swung to his hips, always seemed just two more angles to him.

He had no schooling, had Sheriff Payne —out of books! He was the man responsible for the sign over our heads:

THIS IS THE CO. JAIL. PLEAS KEEP OUT.

The big, heavy fellow chewing tobacco beside me was a typical cowboy enjoying a few years of "civilization." When the conduit had come over the mountains two years before to bring electricity to the town Hippo Jones had made the discovery of Dos Daros, our county seat. He had no money, no farm, no wife—just an undersheriff's badge, awful good shooting eyes and a hefty lot of "stummick."

Baldy Fainer—first name Casey for some reason he refused to divulge—was a rare friend of Dame Fortune. He, too, was a lanky desert rat who had lived forty years or more in the valley and who had never seen a school, except the new one he had just donated to the city. He was a bachelor, as were we all, and an opportunist, as we all were not.

Fainer had eyes that had been able to read the future—and now as he slumped there beside us we were being friends of the "Cantaloup King," the man who furnished New York hotels with their "Miraculo Valley Cants—one half-cut, $1," in April, the month when the more northern vines were just seeking the sun. But money had made no change. He still had a beer appetite, and boasted he had never used a napkin. He was a pioneer, a real one down to the overalls and broken teeth.

My heart beats a bit now as I bring back memories of Lawrence Hentry. I was fond of that boy, poor little kid, who, as he sat there lighting his tenth cigaret of the past hour, was even then signed up on Death's blotter.

He was twenty-three, a slender handsome boy, who had come to this valley from a New York daily's copy-desk to build up weak lungs. He had one fortune, an indomitable humor, and two misfortunes, a four-page weekly in which he had sunk every penny, and a sharp metallic cough that came always without warning and often under embarrassing circumstances. Especially was that resounding, twanging cough likely to come in the dust stir of evening or under excitement. His little two-sheet *Argus*, printed there ninety-one feet below sea level, had the motto, "An Ace in the Hole," under its flag.

As for me? Just a tired newspaper man, too. Taught to be wise, to see under disguises, to detect false witnesses, disclose sham, expose untruths—I had exchanged my meager life's savings for a ten-acre patch of alkali that wouldn't grow devil-grass.

These are the main characters, *dramatis* *personæ*, if you wish—all of them except he who was to wave the wand, to be villain, hero, comedian, principal super in this drama of men.

We were waiting for his weekly pilgrimage to town that day. He always came on Fridays for mail and a few provisions that his bodyguard carried away without a word from their master in their saddlebags. Once a month their team came in.

And as we were about to forget him temporarily and make our pilgrimage to Gomez' across the road, we saw far down Broadway the dust of his caravan. It reopened the flood gates of conversation.

"And the only way to find out if he has an electric fence is to go there some night and find out," said Hentry, taking up the talk at the very point it had been abandoned when we thought we needed throat-oil to keep it going. "Don't ask him about it. He doesn't look crazy, exactly, to me and it wouldn't be there when we were looking for evidence if he got wise."

We sat there watching the figure and his trailing guards growing larger down the road. The boy went on:

"I've already met the gentleman informally. When he landed here a few weeks ago. Found only his name to be Caldwell Hempster and he loathed newspaper ginks. Say, were I that handsome I'd been a bigamist long ago."

Sheriff Payne shook the tobacco crumbs from his shirt front and brought his cane chair on its four legs with a thump.

"I'm goin' ta talk ta this *hombre*," he murmured. "Mebbe learn somethin'."

"Ask him how is his alkali mine," put in the boy.

I squirmed.

The sheriff stepped into the glare and sauntered across the dust-padded road to the path of Dos Daros' first great sensation.

"Howd'ye, Mister Hempster," we heard him call. "How's things out yer way?"

The rider drew rein and gave a half-salute with his crop to his helmet.

"Satisfactory," he said softly.

Payne's lips formed another phrase, but Hempster spurred his horse suddenly, curved him around the sheriff and cantered away.

Payne dropped his mouth open and stared after the retreating figure. Then he returned to us in steps unusually lengthy for this period of the day.

"Listen," he snapped into the face of Jones, "you're a deputy here, and you and me's a-goin' to find out somethin' about this guy, what's afraid ta talk ta a cop, tonight!"

"That's O. K. with me," said Jones. "What I'm paid for."

Action! We suddenly realized how bored we were, how we had longed day after day for excitement. A dog fight would have englamoured our lives just then.

We wrenched ourselves from the bench. We fell to talking fast. We were all young in spirit. It was Adventure Land to us. Could we go? No! We could not! What in —— had we to do with the sheriff's office? Nothing, but we were friends, could ride, shoot if necessary; young, eager, there might be lots of trouble; two lone men against a score perhaps—oh, many of the arguments used by men driven by monotony into anything for excitement.

Hentry and I had been trained all our lives to get what we went after. We knew how to exaggerate in the correct proportions, too. We made a big thing of it. "Gigantic Task Confronts Authorities," so to speak in our old language. We put over some very neat propaganda.

We marched in at last to swear away all liability of collecting damages from the county and marched out again new men.

"But it's a lotta hours 'fore night, chief," said Fainer as the new deputy sheriffs staggered out under the weight of their unnumbered badges, "an' I'll just betcha fer one big glass o' beer I kin spit over that hitchin' post from eight feet. 'Four-eyes' here holds the dough."

I was Four-eyes.

"I'm in on this," said the young editor, "but I'll be darned if I'll let a deserter from the news game hold my good money. There are five of us. Four bits a drink. Two dollars and a half!"

"The sheriff and Fainer must take handicaps of two feet," I suggested. "They have front teeth missing, and, besides, any six foot four inch guys with long, lean, muscular and leather jaws ought to be willing to give a few feet."

It was all in the play of the idle hours before the trek.

They gave the handicap and Fainer won by another two feet. I met ignominious defeat.

"The Dutch courage for tonight is on

Four-eyes!" cried the boy as we stepped into the fire of the sun for Gomez' merriment factory.

WE SWUNG our off-legs over the saddle that evening in the glow of a faded indigo sky and the silence of a heat worn world panting for late evening's stir and accompanying rejuvenation.

We planned, as a blind, to separate in pairs and join up again before the destination. We were known as buddies, although the word was not very well known then, and our going off together occasioned no comment, but there had been a tremendous influx of natives of India into the valley in the past few months and it was any spy of Hempster that we feared.

The valley is today athrong with Hindus. They love the climate. It is the closest thing to their native land—with advantages of freedom and irrigation conditions they could never dream of at home—and even then they were reaping fortunes from their agricultural sagacity, hardiness and native thrift.

"You fellas," said the sheriff as we were ready to bid *adios*, "gotta 'member you're unnumbered deputies and don't amount to much at givin' orders. Nobody ast you to come, but I got a right to deputize anybody when I need help—and I guess you fellas make me need help a'right."

"We are treated with gross indignity," cried the boy, and we saluted our chief solemnly with the five-finger exercise at our noses and trotted away.

We turned our pintos toward my ranch upon my offer of a little brown jug under the Artesian well, and Hentry began to regale me with a Hindu divorce, the legal papers of which, in typical reporter suavity, he had placed in his pocket for future perusal as he made his rounds through the temporary court-house earlier in the day.

The divorce was the first of its kind in the State, the boy said, and showed women of India were not as submissive in a new land as in the old. He had sent a short "freak" to the Los Angeles *Times*, for which he was the valley's correspondent. He handed it to me.

"Awful official looking document," I said as I returned it.

"State seal, stamps, ribbon and all that good old make-believe," he answered in one of his rare cynical moods, "and just because two people don't care to live together anymore. Funny people we are."

"Well, divorce grabbers don't work any harder to get what they want than we who desire a little thrill of excitement."

"Or a sip from a merry jug that is crying for succor as it is nearly drowning under an ice-cold Artesian," returned the boy. "Onward, Scandal!"

That was his horse's name; because it was the thing all good newspaper men loved, he said.

The feet of our horses pattered from the the soft silt as we turned from the road and in the darkness I knew we were arriving near the jug when the feet of our mounts suddenly struck the flinty path.

Beyond the little adobe house the early night sky was turning to gray-blue. There were billions of stars and no moon. It was a typical desert night—the smell of the first cooling of heated earth, the broad, flat expanse that our senses but not our eyes knew went clear and unobstructed to the mountains forty miles beyond; the muffled, rolling, throaty cry of some dog in the distance feeling his returning strength after a day of fitful sleep. It was all there. I feel and see it now. It will be there always for me, even though there may be now the mingling smell of gasoline from the broad highway below.

It is sealed away, clean and fresh and sweet, with Lorry Hentry now and for all time. He took it away with him as part of his last memory almost twenty years ago. I believe he sleeps well.

An hour after we had found the little brown jug we were joined again with Payne and Jones and soon had crossed the last irrigation ditch that divides cactus from alfalfa like a line torn by a ragged-edged knife.

Three minutes later we swerved our horses at a windowless, two-story, brick building—a monument of the joint grave of a fortune and an overconfidence that died from thirst after the failure of the ditches to grow that far—and swung through the mesquite and devil's candles.

Suddenly as we plunged out of a coulée we saw before us the lighted windows of the home of the Dos Daros mystery. We slipped from our horses, led them back into the gulley and tied each to a cactus-tree.

Sheriff Payne and his deputy brought

forth a pair of rubber undertakers' gloves and a pair of pliers from their saddle-bags.

"I got a little voltmeter here," whispered the sheriff, "an' I'm a-goin' ta stick it ta that thar fence. If it just spins the needle right off, I'll know it's charged a'right. You three stay here. Hip and me'll try it. If she's full o' juice then we'll go in for explanations."

They crept away.

The home of Caldwell Hempster was a one-story, well-built adobe house set back two hundred yards from the fence and between a row of young and struggling eucalyptus-trees. Behind stood wooden barns as large as the house, and a whitewashed silo. The piteously stunted rosebushes, the sand-blown walks between the dried up flowers and the drooping, sickly sunflower hedge spoke eloquently of the lack of water.

We sensed all this more than saw it for the darkness was slowly closing in, as it only can on a desert when there is not even a promise of a late crescent.

"In the last years I been here'bouts," said Fainer quietly, "I seen hundreds a them city farmers give their little alls fer a slick salesman's spiel and nothin' more. But this ain't no mistake, I'm a-tellin' yuh. Put up here three months ago about by a gang o' Hindus, headed by Willie Bhagu. Hempster had a pile at Cramer's bank that raised the town's wealth by a lot and Bhagu helped the bank clearin's consid'able by drawin' freely. Then she got finished and in rides the gent'man outa them stone mountains. Caravan o' Hindus drivin' wagonloads o' furniture—and here it is out here in this forsaken hole a hun'red and fifty feet below sea level."

"Looks like the Valley of Penance," commented Hentry.

Suddenly the sheriff and his deputy walked silently upon us.

"I jus' left the voltmeter thing out thar," he said. "Ain't much good nohow now, I think. Say, dyn'mite don't kick like that fence!"

"——!" muttered Fainer. "Yer ain't talkin' foolish, Payne?"

"Foolish ——!"

"But how is it no one ever ran on to it?" asked Hentry.

"I figure it's only on nights," the deputy informed us. "Joe Diggan's mutt got it prowlin' at night. Found its body back here, but he had them peculiar burns. Diggan went right in the wire gate in the daytime to ast about it. Everybody very much no *sabe.* Got only to the front door. Hempster met him thar and was gosh darn put out at the idear. Laughed kinda loud and leaned on the fence!"

"This is against all sorts of laws," I said. "I vote we cut that wire and go in and have a look before he gets too wise and covers up. I'm pretty sure, Payne, I saw a figure near the gate, so we must be careful. I have a hunch they must keep a guard there near a switch to cut off the juice if any one comes. This electricified fence must be only a protection against surprize. That's the only way I can figure it. They couldn't kill many people and get away with it. I notice the big conduit comes down this way and I suppose that is where they get the power."

"Diggan said he noticed a lot of 'lectric rig in a barn," added Jones. "Probably Hempster had to show things like that to explain his request for so much juice from the company."

"No one does this without good reason," whispered Hentry. "We've got a right to investigate, sheriff."

"Yes," said Fainer, "by law you ain't got to tell no crook you're after him. Mebbe we can get the fella fer more'n just chargin' that fence."

"There's a couple of lighted windows low enough to see into," I urged.

"An' there's left-over wire, chief, lyin' around, enough to keep us from breakin' the circuit and perhaps settin' off one a them alarms inside the house," Jones informed. "We can loop the wire first and then cut the tight. I seen 'lectric fences afore around a prize pig pen onct. I know how to cut it."

"Tha's good!"

This was the sheriff's characteristic phrase by which he made all of his decisions.

We crawled forward, the chief and Jones leading. Two minutes later Jones had gingerly made a connecting loop higher in the fence, the sheriff had snapped the lower wire and we were snaking ourselves under the death-stinging wire.

We had laid some plans as far as we believed they would go, but as usual events were to amend the course: Jones and myself at one window, Payne and Fainer at another; Hentry to be sentry and guard at our backs. To see what was being done for three minutes and retreat into the shadow of the eucalyptus row for a council of war.

The possibility of a guard being at the front gate had given us considerable worry and Fainer had been dispatched earlier to crawl as near as possible to it and see if it would be possible to put him under arrest without creating a disturbance while we were connecting our loop. He returned just after we had cut the wire.

"The gate's shut," he whispered, "but inside there's a somethin' lyin' down. An' if you ast me, I'd say it was a Hindu either hard asleep or—dead!"

We were taken back with the news, but we were silent.

"I've seen a dead 'un many a time," Fainer whispered on, "an' I'd say he was dead."

"——!" muttered Payne, "it's too dark ta tell fer sure, Baldy!"

"Well, anyhows we don't need to worry he's a-goin' ta see us if we don't make no hullabaloo," confided Fainer.

"Let's move!" urged Hentry, and in his excitement his voice broke. He smothered a cough with his hand, and swore.

The two windows gave out light from the same room, and like second-story men deciding the lay of the haul we crept under them. Hentry, hating us outspokenly yet good-naturedly giving in to our selfishness, kneeled behind us like an artillery officer about to direct his battery.

Slowly we came up like weak-springed jacks-in-the-box.

I will not forget the sight that met our startled eyes.

There, thirty miles from a very pioneer civilization and 8,000 miles from mahogany baronial halls, sat Caldwell Hempster in a great oaken chair. He was dressed in a dark smoking jacket, a floor ash-tray stand at his elbow, an oriental rug at his feet. Behind him was a carved writing desk with a stiff-backed chair before it. At his side was a huge square table, and an old-fashioned filigree sideboard of oak, sparkling with cut-glass tumblers and decanters in perfect alignment. Unusual canvases depicting landscapes of old India graced the walls. A brilliant but simple brass chandelier glowed over his head.

Hempster smoked a cigar and wearily read from a tattered magazine, the only shabby thing in the room. And as he read I believed I saw on his face an expression of hopeless anguish, of dread and of silent and deep suffering.

And although I knew he had deliberately set a deadly guard against his fellow men, that I believed he would have considered very little our deaths on his deceptive wires, yet, as I look back now on the events that were to come, I feel just a little proud that my heart went out to the lonely figure that night.

I thought, too, of the name the young editor had conferred on the gulch a few minutes before and amended it silently to the Valley of Remorse.

Jones suddenly gripped my arm and drew me down, and following the command in those talon-like fingers I slunk after him to the trees. The sheriff, Fainer and Hentry were already there.

"Did yuh see?" whispered Jones. "A Rockefeller's mansion in this dump o' cactus and rattlesnakes!"

"Tha's good!" muttered the sheriff. "Did I see it!"

"I seen stuff like it in the Palace Hotel in Frisco onct," said Fainer.

"And who'd stay here in this dry hole when he's got all that money?" I put in.

"Any crook a-hidin'!" snapped the sheriff. "Some'd live inside —— if they weren't so many there ta see 'em!"

"And sheriffs to catch them," I said.

"That's where he is," added Hentry. "And I ought to have a look now and then at such. I've heard many a minister describe it but ——"

"I think we oughta arrest him now, rich or not, for that fence," said Fainer authoritatively. "My cattle ——"

But the sheriff thought differently.

"Tha's bad! This got more ta it than jus' swell stuff an' 'lectric fences," he said. "We go back fer more looks."

We needed no further urging. Hentry, pleading almost angrily for a chance to view the strange sight, was thrust back as sentry.

"An' watch that —— cough o' yours, boy!" put in Fainer brutally.

We rose again beside the window. Hempster had moved. He was now at the writing table, running his long thin fingers through a drawer of papers. Suddenly I saw his hand jerk to a stop and a look of some secret pain tighten his jaw. He pulled his hand from the drawer. It clutched with strained fingers on a tiny, old-fashioned pearl-handled revolver. Slowly he looked into the barrel and shuddered. He shook his head. His lips moved.

"I can't understand ——"

It was the mere forming of his lips around the words.

Then his fingers gave a nervous twirl to the cylinder. I saw it was one of those vicious little pin-cartridge pistols that it was fashionable for a woman to possess thirty years ago.

With a jerk of his wrist he cast the gun into the drawer and slammed it shut. He walked slowly to the big chair and slipped into it. His head fell forward upon his arm. His eyes closed.

A cricket began to sing sharply in the renewed silence.

A movement of a door behind the slumped figure caught my eye. A Hindu had slipped in and stood motionless, his back silently closing the door, his right hand hidden in the folds of his loose coat. The newcomer stood there, surveying with his glittering eyes the back of the figure in the chair.

As if subject to some magnetic pull, so evenly did he move, the Hindu hovered in the rear of the seated man. Suddenly I saw his hand slip from the coat and the glitter of a long revolver in the prehensile fingers.

I was stunned, fascinated, and I know now the others with me were too. Perhaps Sheriff Payne's police sense would have forced him to draw his gun and leap through the window before the blow fell—but the break came from a different source.

It was the sharp, metallic ring of Hentry's unexpected cough. Sensing in our tense bodies that a drama was being played, he had crept forward—and the cough came at my ear.

Hempster leaped from the chair like a cat attacked while asleep and stood stiffly staring out the window.

"Go!" snapped Jones.

And at my fleeting last glance I saw the Hindu calmly lifting his revolver to fire and Hempster spin around to face him, a long knife suddenly appearing in his hand from under his armpit.

The crash of a revolver shot sounded at the window as I fell to the ground and began bellying my way to the trees in a frantic scramble. Hentry was at my elbow, and as I dug my fingers into the sand with wild energy I heard him panting curses against that cough.

"Stay flat, Lor," I whispered. "Payne and Jones stayed back. They'll cover our go!"

No more shots. We crawled behind the trees.

"Didn't see us," breathed the boy. "Where's Fainer? —— this cough!"

NO MATTER what small town politicians had been able to spread through that Mexican border county before Payne's elections in the years he had held office, he had never been whispered to a political death on the allegation of cowardice. Dos Daros' older men remembered him in the real frontier days of the valley long before the water and they were still the firm back-bone of the county.

I wish some one else might write this story, for one is usually treated better by others when it comes to speaking of bravery. But the only one in that party who could do more than write his own name did not come out of it very far, and so I must record that lying under the trees, forming a prayer to my favorite idol, a blush of shame sprang to my face as I heard Fainer calling suddenly for help at the rear of the house.

Little Hentry, who had never been under more exciting circumstances than working under pressure of edition time from the slot on a newspaper copy-desk, and who had never handled anything more deadly than a soft-nosed lead-pencil, had dashed away at the call with a revolver clutched in his hand.

"That —— cough!" he muttered as he ran.

I stood there bewildered, my revolver dangling at the end of my arm. I was confused. Where had the boy gone? As soon as he left me the night had swallowed him up as if he had dropped into a hole.

I started to step out. Then I stopped short as I heard the sheriff calling Jones from the front of the house and a shot snip the end off his command. Fainer shouted again and his call was choked abruptly as if fingers had slipped around his throat.

I had become a dummy. I had been through the Spanish-American fracas for a New York paper and under fire many times, but I had never learned personally much of the technique of night revolver frays or even guerilla warfare. And up to this minute I had never felt blood rush into my eyes.

I did the only thing instinct told me, as it has told thousands of soldiers—clutched tight to my gun and let it start me away in the direction of Fainer's last call.

But as I started out my alert ears caught the soft sound as of a cat dropping from a branch. I turned my head and peered into the dark face of a crouching figure not six feet away.

I caught the glimpse of a nickle-plated revolver, and lifted my gun. It blazed straight into a Hindu's face. He sprawled on his side. I leaped to my feet and dashed away toward the barn.

"Up with 'em!"

I flung my hands above my head.

"It's me, sheriff!"

"Webbie?"

"Yes, Fainer called for help."

"Yea. Can't find um. Where's Hippo?"

"Don't know. Went to the trees. Hentry went out when Fainer yelled. Hindu jumped me. Shot him."

"Tha's bad! Get down!"

A figure was crawling through the flower beds beside the barn door where we now stood. Payne trained his gun on it.

"You, Hip?"

"Yea, chief."

The deputy crawled to us and we hunched together beside the barn door. Everything was so quiet we could hear each other's breath.

"You stand front door," commanded the sheriff to Jones. "I'm goin' in rear."

"Let Webbie guard," urged Jones. "I'll go with you."

"No, Hip. Woods full o' 'em. I'll need you out here."

There was nothing more said. But the call of Fainer and my dazed and sorry failure to act quicker were cuts to my pride that would not let me stay behind. I fell on my hands and knees behind the sheriff and crawled noiselessly at his shoes to the rear door.

Jones had already slunk away into the darkness.

"I'm with you, Payne," I whispered as we stopped.

"You're here," said the sheriff laconically.

Suddenly he stood up and pressed softly on the door. It gave. There was light within. Payne thrust open the door and followed his revolver around the jamb.

The room, a kitchen, was empty. A pot simmered on a kerosene stove.

" 'Lo, there," said Payne evenly.

There was not a sound.

I stood over the door sill and waited, my gun held across my pumping heart. Payne stepped across the room to an open door that showed a lighted room beyond. Leaning against the kitchen side of the jamb, he waited.

"I want ta talk ta yuh, Hempster," he said softly. "This is Sheriff Payne."

There was no answer.

Again I followed as he stepped boldly into the room. It was that into which we had been looking at the time of the cough of poor Hentry.

Stretched limply on the floor, his arms spread out, lay the body of a Hindu. A tiny pool of blood was forming under his arm.

"Tha's bad! See if dead."

I went to the figure and examined it. It was the Hindu who had slipped in with the revolver as we had watched through the window.

"Stabbed through the throat," I muttered. "Dead."

But the sheriff paid no attention now. He had crossed the room and was listening beside another door. Suddenly he turned his head and pointed across the floor. I followed with my eyes.

A long, delicate, blood-stained knife and a revolver side by side.

As I crept forward to examine them, I was brought to my feet by a shrieking roll of laughter from the next room. I felt my sombrero rise from my head as my hair stiffened. Only a woman could make that hysterical sound, I thought.

Payne tugged at the door knob—

"Open this door!"

Only renewed shrieks of laughter.

"Open the door! I give you warnin'! This is the sheriff! I'll break it down!"

We heard a pounding on the front door and the crash of its glass. A second later Jones plunged into the room.

"Good God, Payne, let's get in thar!" he groaned. "She's bein' kilt in thar!"

We flung ourselves on the door like maniacs. We had the strength of a dozen men. As we plunged the laughter grew louder and louder. Suddenly as the panel split the shrieks broke and we heard no more. A minute later we had plowed through.

The room, as far as furnishings and people were concerned, was bare!

Swinging in a cage on a long wire from the roof was a great, brilliant black, crow-like bird with a blunted bright-yellow beak. It stared at us with an eye of insanity. An old, weather-blighted leather trunk lay on its side. Payne gave it a kick and it sounded like a sodden sack.

The open window told us how our birds had flown.

"Front door, Hip! Don't show at the winda!"

Jones dashed away. The sheriff and I sped to the kitchen and out.

As we stood there bewildered and befuddled, our ears caught the dull clatter of many hoofs far outside the fence in the desert. We appeased our anger with foolish shots into the night. It was one of those scenes that the newspapers mean when they say the criminals escaped "under a fusillade of bullets."

"Sorry, chief," whispered Jones as he came running at our shots. "Didn't use no head, Payne. Never thunk it only a trick ta draw me inside from the front and let 'em go out by the winda."

Sheriff Payne shrugged his shoulder.

"Ferget it," he said quietly. "I'd have done the same. An' I don't think them wild shrieks was ta draw anybody anywheres. Now let's see where the kid an' Fainer is."

"I seen somethin' lyin' near the gate jus' like Fainer did," Jones informed us. "Jus' goin' ta 'vestigate it when the screams started ta come. Looks like a body a'right."

We moved cautiously around the house and walked to the gate.

It was the body of another Hindu, stabbed through the heart.

"Tha's bad!" said the sheriff. "Tear off fer some boys from town an' the coroner, Jones, —— fast! Webbie and me'll start lookin' fer Fainer an' the kid."

SINCE that night I have been on many deserts and in many worrying situations, but I can't recall such sickening dread and fear as that which came upon me as we searched fruitlessly throughout the night for our two companions.

We had found a switch on our visit to the gate and the fence was dead.

Just as dawn was coming we came upon their sombreros and guns in a dry flower bed near the stable door. And many hours later, after the coroner had made his examination, I rode away leading the empty saddles.

The coroner had pronounced my shot under the trees lucky for both myself and the tree-climbing Hindu, and Jones remained behind awaiting a wagon to remove the two bodies and our wounded prisoner to the county jail. Payne was already many hours into the desert heading a posse toward the Iron Mountains to which Hempster had apparently made good his escape.

On the wagon also was to come the trunk found in the room of the shrieks. The sheriff had found it unlocked, opened it and suddenly found women's clothes spilled on the floor. He lifted them up before me and I admit we were surprized. There was a peculiar, unknown perfume about them, so faint that it made one unconsciously think of places far away, mysterious places where one had never been but had dreamed of in pleasant sleep.

The clothes had been worn, but that time was long ago. I lifted a dress and filmy lace came away in my hand. It had "leg o' mutton" sleeves that made one think again of a picture of my mother that once had the honored place on a wall in a stone house in the Lehigh Valley, where I was born.

But the sheriff had one of his hunches and he ordered them brought along.

I coveted that strange, crow-like bird, but it was a nasty creature and when we attempted to lift its cage down its beak went into Payne's hand. With a crash the cage fell to the floor, the bottom spun into a corner and our treasure was out the window.

TWO days passed before Payne returned empty handed and went direct to Fainer's bachelor rancho to rest and eat the health-restoring dishes of the cantaloup king's famous cook, Lew Sam.

The posse had returned with Payne and been dispersed. It had been just four men, who for some reason were told very little about the case and who soon lost interest out there on that great pancake griddle. They believed Hempster a bad-check fugitive who had been hiding away from the law, just as soon as they were asked to trail him, and Payne let them think it.

The wounded Hindu was already removed to the county jail from the three-room hospital and was taking nourishment from the well-cooked meals of Mrs. Peggy O'Heere, jail matron and town seamstress. The two brought in on the wagon had been buried immediately under certification of the coroner and the inquest held in abeyance. The grave waited for no man in those days when the thermometer often hugged 105° for fourteen hours of the day.

The coroner buried them and passed the whole matter out of his mind.

It was a commentary on the valley and the times that neither the posse nor the coroner knew our two companions were missing. Why Payne wanted it kept a secret I do not know today. He had told Jones and me to keep quiet about it before he took up the trek.

I rode over from my little ranch to see Sheriff Payne when I heard he had returned. He was dozing in a hammock on the porch, but as I swung from my horse to the shade under the eaves he lifted his head over the netting and gave me a solemn eye.

"What news, son?"

"None," I answered. "Just came over to offer you what help I can give. I've got to see it through, of course. I only hope you will give me a chance to. I've been looking around a bit, haven't found much but——"

"Tha's good!"

The sheriff shifted the embroidered pillow at his head—a gift, it was, from Fainer's maiden aunt in Los Angeles—tucked up his long shanks and disappeared again below the curving sides of the hammock.

I sat down feeling like an awkward schoolboy who has been told to go to the foot of the class. I did not know Sheriff Payne then as I was to know him before many days had passed. Lew Sam brought me a cantaloup and a tray with four claret punches on it.

I smoked a cigaret and thought of little Hentry. Somehow I didn't worry so much about the big, raw-boned farmer. The lad wasn't dead; we were sure of that just as we were about Fainer. But thinking of him there in the dead heat of that afternoon I found no comfort in the cigaret, no comradeship as we two had found it so often over our little brown rolls.

Others might toy with the stem of a wine glass in the speeding hours of intimacy, but as for the boy and me we argued and grew fond of each other best under the lazy wreaths of smoke.

"Jones come yet?"

I turned and saw the sheriff sitting up in the net.

"No, but I think I see him trotting through the dust back there."

We watched his slouching figure come riding up the road, and as he slipped from his horse under the big eaves he caught sight of his chief above.

"No word," he said sharply, as he flung his hat on the porch. "But I just looked through that trunk of clothing we left at the jail. All women's stuff. Darn'est junk you ever seen. Mrs. O'Heere says it was just the thing thirty years ago."

"Umph," murmured Payne.

"I don't like the looks o' things," continued the under-sheriff. "Y'know, sheriff, that wounded fella ain't never said nothin' all the time you been 'way. I kinda think he jus' feels —— sure somethin' nice is a-goin' to happen his way. I got him charged with assault to commit murder on Four-Eyes here to hold him till the investigation finishes."

"What's he actin' like?"

"It ain't all him, chief, except he's so —— cocky, but last night I seen some —— suspicious shadows creepin' around the jail. Didn't want ta take no shot at 'em an' scare everybody, an' they didn't do nothin' an' went away. I think mebbe somebody's plannin' escape fer that guy, and so I come right out fast when I heard you was here, ta talk ta you about it. Why didn't cha come back ta the jail?"

"We won't stop ta talk about it now," said the sheriff as he slid from the hammock. "I jus' want ta lay here away from it all and think. Wait'll I get me a saddle."

BEFORE we had trotted into Broadway, which led down the center of town, we sensed something was wrong at the jail, and as we rounded the corner we saw there was activity there. A small group had gathered on the street. We set our spurs cruelly and as we swung down upon it we saw Mrs. O'Heere running excitedly about in the crowd.

The gathering gave way as we clattered to the jail and dismounted before the voluble matron, in whose charge the jail and its one wounded prisoner had been left by Jones on his hasty trip to his chief.

"He's gone!" screamed the matron when she sighted us. "That black feller. Two other black uns come in wid guns at me face and took the key and went away wid him! Oh, Mr. Payne!"

We rushed into the jail. One of the three cells yawned wide.

"They held me up!" groaned Mrs. O'Heere. "An' just walked out perlite-like twenty minutes ago! Tied me up! Think o' it! Nobody bothered 'em, an' me a-screamin' bloody murder all the time! Ten minutes before anybody come to me!"

The sheriff stood flat-footed before the open door and said nothing.

"He was dumb all the time, chief," said Jones. "Nary a word outa him. Tough to trace, I guess mebbe."

"We might head them off!" I panted. "They've got a long way to go to get to those mountains!"

Payne shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll make a dash outa here fer the looks o' things," he commanded evenly, "but we'll go ta Webbie's ranch and talk this thing over. This crowd didn't go ta no Hempster. They don't belong to him a-tall. Whatcha think o' that? Now let's shake them legs out!"

"THIS is bad," said Payne when the three of us had dragged ourselves dejectedly into my little shack. "This little 'venture we all started on kiddin' each other is —— near tragedy. Two o' the best desert rats—what you call 'em—what ever slept with a rattlesnake has searched that salt hole out thar fer the bodies o' Fainer and the kid—and the best they get out o' it is that none a 'em left that yard. Them buzzards would've flown them circles long ago, too.

"Well, guys don't go up in none o' this thin air stuff that I ever seen, and I just might as well tell you two fellas you're good enough friends o' mine ta hear me say I ain't got no idear a-tall what ta do nex'."

"I ain't no stage detective," confessed Jones, "an' I got ta add, chief, that I'm hog tied and rollin' in the pen along o' you. I ain't used ta this —— creepy stuff. If they'd come out like reg'lar guys and bring two guns apiece I'd like it better."

"I know little of police work," I put in, "but, Payne, I think that somewhere in the history of Hempster lies the solution of all this mystery. This isn't just the case of a crook trying to hide from the police. I hold the theory that Hempster didn't flee from us at all, but from some one he thought we were. The man isn't any common crook—if he is one at all—and there must be some good reason for the charged fence, the slaying of a Hindu at the very minute he would be thinking more of flight, and the mysterious way he lived the life of a recluse with only Indian attendants. The dead Hindu at the gate is not so deep. I think he was a guard, sort of a gateman who could shut off the current if any one other than the mysterious enemy came. You know we found the switch there.

"I hear those Hindu were educated fellows, of a very high caste and far from being the usual laborer or servant. Rather companions."

"They were —— handy with knives and guns," put in Jones. "An' it kinda looks ta me like they used some Hindu trick stuff on Fainer and Hentry."

"That's true, Jones," I admitted, "but I believe from what the chief said as we left the jail that he was of the same mind as myself on some theory like the one I have worked out. I don't think he meant what he said when he just told us he didn't know what to do next."

"I'll listen," said Payne.

"That there were Hempster Hindus and Anti-Hempster Hindus around that house that night."

I caught a slight nod of the sheriff.

"I looked at the one killed at the gate," I continued, "and he had a different turban than that wounded fellow just picked away from Mrs. O'Heere, or the dead one inside the house. Am I right, chief?"

"I gotta admit I was thinkin' that way, sorta, lad."

"Well," I urged, "there is only one thing I can suggest, sheriff. Hempster didn't come out of nowhere. He came over the Iron Mountains from San Diego. Now suppose we visit the British office there and ask what they know about this?"

"What'd they know?" exclaimed Payne.

"Hempster," I said emphatically, "is English. When I first came to the ranch to see you today I wanted to tell you something, but you were darn tired and you went to sleep before I could. Well, I played a hunch and walked over to the post-office and asked Gelder, who runs said government station, what sort of mail Hempster got. I did it when you were still away and Jones was busy at the jail.

"Gelder says the mail is as mysterious as the man himself. Big, canvas-lined envelopes, stamped sometimes with the British Home Office seal and sometimes with a coat of arms from some estate in England. Gelder didn't remember the family name, but I think it might be known to the British office at San Diego."

The sheriff was on his feet.

"You edicated guys make me sick! Yer takes a long time to get to the point!"

He was excited for the first time.

"Tha's good! Now listen, Jones. Things is at a standstill here. They ain't nothin' we can do. They've all escaped. It ain't possible ta trace that Hindu. I know my biz. Most of 'em look alike, and he might be hidin' on any o' the hundred Hindu farms here. The one thing ta do is ta find this Hempster, and the only way we can do that is ta find out first who he is.

"You stay here, Hippo, an' just use yer judgment. If anythin' happens swear in a couple good boys and go ta it. I'm goin' ta San D'ago. I'd like you ta trapes along, Webbie. I ain't much ta home with them diplo-mate fellas."

"As it happens," I said, "I once had a very close friend in the San Diego office. Correspondent for a London paper I met in the late fracas with Spain. I'll go with pleasure. He may be still there—and, sheriff, there may be more Scotch than English about him if it's the same old Gannon."

* * *

WE started an hour later for the long trek to Paradise Wells, forty miles across the pitiless desert, and then into the Iron Mountains that would eventually lead us into Mexico and out again at Tia Juana. We had a mule-drawn buckboard and two saddle-horses. One of us was to drive the wagon. The other was to ride saddle and lead the empty. We needed the wagon for water and fodder for man and beast. Automobiles were not a part of the average police department equipment in those days and a gas-cart that could run across that desert better than a mule was yet to be invented.

Outside of Dos Daros we thumped into the ruts that the Butterfield Stage first began to wear in 1858 on its trip from Yuma to the coast and I marveled as we battered our wagon along that the coach had ever delivered its passengers intact. I think the valley should have an extra Thanksgiving day dating from the early 80's when the Southern Pacific came in and ended the career of the stage.

A rare rain had come to be drunk by the desert in the spring and the usually drab scene had taken life. We crashed on through silent lanes of giant devil's-candles, the brilliant scarlet flowers bending the unprepared fonts under their weight.

The coarseness of the desert had toned. Everything had born flower, adding to the usually cruel landscape splotches of brilliant Chinese vermillion that astonish the eye. Yet in them we saw only the desert's tribute on the undug graves of our friends.

We camped that night under the most lustrous sky I have ever seen in the years I have wandered since. There was no moon. A coyote shrieked hideously for many hours, and when it gave me peace to sleep I dozed away to the sound of a mouse biting into the root of a cactus for its evening drink.

Evening of the second day was falling when a shout came clearly back to me from the sheriff who was scouting ahead of the team, and I knew he had sighted the wells. I whipped the span for the first time during the trek and when I rattled up to the rickety tank-house that arose so abruptly and spectacularly in that heartless desert I found the sheriff tying his horse a short distance away from the trough.

He had just come back to the team and was helping me unhitch when we were jarred to our hearts by a call from the tiny hut that nestled below the tank.

Without a word, we spun around and dashed toward the call, leaving the startled mules rearing in the trailing harness. As we leaped the broken cactus hedge that surrounded the hut, Fainer, worn and haggard, rushed upon us from the doorway.

We clung to him like women.

* * *

WE pushed him inside the one room that harbored Joe Philipe, famous Gunga Din of the one oasis of the Miraculo Desert. Joe sold his water by the quart with a gun on his hip, but he had a barrel of hospitality, and water also, for a soldier of the desert, wounded in action against the common foe, thirst and gold fever.

"Lot ta tell, but not everythin'," the rancher said to us as we led him through the door and placed him in a cane chair. "Been in saddle four days."

"A'right, Baldy, keep yer shirt on. We'll get to it all in time. You need teeth exercise more'n tongue."

But I couldn't stand for that.

"Where's Hentry?" I yelled.

"The kid? Why I don't know, boy. Ain't seen him since after we broke from that winda."

"Well, I'll be ——!" I said.

"Tha's —— bad!" muttered Payne between his teeth.

"Somethin' happen to the kid?"

"Went like you," I offered. "Just dropped from sight."

"A little information," grumbled Fainer. "I thought you-all was together."

"You're kinda sick lookin'," Payne informed him. "We'll have a little grub and then we'll talk. Joe, got somethin'?"

Philipe threw a few dirty tin plates on his table and we sat down to cabbage soup.

"Fainer brung in by one o' them Hindus," he confided to Payne, jerking a hand toward the rancher. "Jus' short time ago. Dumped him like a pile a good riddance and snuck. Didn't even buy no drink fer his hoss!"

Ten minutes later we had demolished a rabbit-stew and Joe was slouched in his squeaking corner chair, his little sun-faded eyes eager for the story that was to come. Joe was fond of company. He dated his loneliness clear back to the 'eighties when the stage quit running past his door.

"Here goes," started Fainer suddenly. I'll start from the barn so's you kin get it all."

As I write today, almost twenty years later, I can still see that little scene as if it were conjured before me on my writing desk.

Fainer, heavy-eyed, in a cane chair, a brown-paper cigaret I had rolled for him drooping from his moving lips, reclining head and arms over the table. Payne, chair reared against the rough adobe wall, his bushy hair tattered like a moth-eaten polar bear rug, his keen blue eyes watching unwinkingly the earth floor, the sombrero tilted against the wall near his boots, his thin head almost on his chest.

And myself, nerves a-jingle from the long ride, my sore eyes wearying for the glasses I had left in town, my sun-bitten face pricking as it oozed sweat, the frantic urging within me to scream for action, bearing down hard on a desire to curse Fainer for his drawl.

Through my blurring eyes I saw the mouth of Fainer opening and closing with emphasis as he disclosed his story.

"Somebody up and smacked me a hard 'un as I passed the barn door," he was saying. "Went down like a sack o' mud but hittin' out like a cornered rattler. One o' them —— heathens cracked me again. Too many fer me. I yelped fer help like a coyote. Then some o' them dirty black fingers got me under the chin and squz. A sack went over my head. Hog-tied, I was.

"Then I hears shrieks inside the house. There was a lot o' runnin' beside me. Heard Hempster's gab. He says, 'What's this?' One a them —— feriners says, '*Serochi, sahib!*' Best I kin say it, mind you. The Englisher says, 'Put the beast on a saddle. We'll make the rat tell!'

"Imagine that! I shouted like the ——. Yelled lot a wild stuff. Told 'em I was Fainer. Shouted right at 'em:

" 'I'm Fainer, —— you, you dirty——!'

"Then one o' them dirty bums kicked me right in the face. I was kinda through fer a while.

"But whatcha think? Then they threw me over a saddle like as I was a wet saddle blanket. I had to hang there with my knees, and I clung, believe it. Think o' it, Payne! My head in a sack, gallopin' away, somebody leadin' my hoss; —— funny, ain't it?"

His voice dropped away. I was rocking back and forth in my seat to alleviate the pain of my body and weariness of my brain. The sheriff held his head down and scowled. I know he was thinking of the boy.

I heard the voice of Fainer take up the story again:

"Went on like ——, I tell you. Funny feelin' it was. Fought all the time ta get my hands untied at the back. Got 'em. Threw that —— sack off. Leaned over and jerked the reins out o' the Hindu's hand, leadin' me. Jus' —— ta pay. Swung on me with a knife, the dirty bum. Dark as ——, it was too. But he wasn't much on a hoss. Like ta see a guy stab me on a hoss with my hands free. I caught him and we was both in the sand in a snap and the whole shebang stopped. But they wasn't no Hempster. He'd gone ahead.

"They pulled us apart and one a them sees my face. There was a lot of chatterin'. Then one says, 'Sorry, *sahib*, but Meester Hempster say bring you 'long.'

"Oh, I did a lot a yellin'. Showed this —— fool dep'ty badge. But they ain't no 'magination in them guys. So I got —— mad and hit one in the mouth, a —— good smack. Say! He pulled a gun. That's worser'n a knife somehow, 'cause I know just what it will do. I went along.

"An' we moved them plugs along all night. Real animals they got. At daybreak we was sloping along in them mountains with near dead animals under us. An' then we stopped in a little sheltered place and the Englisher comes up.

"Got ta say fer an edicated fella he sure can cuss. He showed me how when he saw who they had brought along. He knew me right away from seein' us sitting under the eaves. An' we thought he never noticed us! He didn't waste any words. He said he'd like ta let me go, but they didn't want anybody ta know just what direction they went. He didn't want you specially ta know. So I was ta stick around until he was able ta see me back with a guard.

"We finally got ta their camp an' I was treated like the King o' England until Hempster tells me he's goin' ta send me 'way with a Hindu so's I wouldn't turn back. But I can find it back, Payne, any time you say."

"Very interestin'," muttered the sheriff laconically, "but what of it?"

"That's what I'd like ta know," continued Fainer. "Is that guy a mystery? Meb-be-e!"

WE SAT there without a word. It was so useless to add anything. After all it was rather an unusual tale, but it just added to the mystery instead of helping to clear it.

But something Fainer had said had started me to thinking. It was the fact that Hempster had appeared friendly, had treated him like the King of England. Well, they must have had conversations. Baldy was a talkative chap. What had they said? Wasn't there any information as to what it was all about? What of the dead Hindu, killed with a knife in the room? What of his panicky flight without even stopping to investigate what the shooting was all about? Why was everything planned for a getaway in such perfect order?

Somehow the sheriff didn't seem satisfied either by a long shot although he sat there staring with his pale blue eyes at the dirt floor, brooding, I thought then and still do, over that boy whom we all loved so. If Hentry wasn't with Fainer, well—then perhaps the buzzards were flying in a funeral circle back there on the desert we were leaving behind. Little Lorry and his smile and his heart-rending cough, who had loved life so because he was to have so little of it.

I brought my mind back to the room again and flung a question at Fainer:

"For heaven's sake! Didn't you find out anything? You been on a pleasure jaunt or something? Why don't you tell us what he said to you, what he did, how he acted, who he might be?"

Fainer stared at me a little hurt. Then his old leather face broke into a smile.

"I was tellin' what happened ta me," he murmured. "Mebbe I kin tell you whether he curled his whiskers every mornin' with wax."

I dropped my head and grinned weakly.

Suddenly he began to talk again. Listening with renewed avidity to the story he was unfolding now I found myself being thrown back and sitting with him and Hempster in their last camp together.

There were scrubby, ill-nourished manzanita surrounding them, he said, with a dirty little pool in the center where the horses were nuzzling. Ten Hindus lay asleep, huddled like grotesque bundles among the horses.

It is a long ago that I am remembering now as I write. I have had an active life since, crowded with days in odd spots of the world and perhaps I am not too exact. Perhaps it was later I learned much of what I now transcribe here, but if so, it matters not—it is the truth only that heeds not time.

Hempster, as I picture the scene Fainer gave to us, was talking in a low, confidential tone as if he were lonely and wanted to hear his voice.

"When I heard a cough outside the window," he was telling Fainer, "I turned to obtain a revolver that hung in a holster over my chair. I found myself facing a Hindu I had never seen before. I know Hindus. He was not of my friends. There was a revolver in the man's hand that spoke as I turned."

The voice droned on.

Six feet of wiry strength had gone into a sudden flash of a knife from under his left armpit and a downward thrust that left cold steel warming in the Hindu's throat.

"I knew," he was saying, "that what I had feared for many days and nights was upon us. I heard a shot outside, and knew it was time to put into execution a scheme of escape I had planned many months. I am an old soldier, sir.

"I rushed into the empty room where I knew there was a window from which I could jump to a horse that would be brought there the minute firing began. It was all arranged.

"You ask of the woman's shrieks, Mr. Fainer, and I can only laugh. There was a bird there, a black mina, the only surviving pet I had brought from India. Looks like one of your crows except it has a yellow beak. But it had better speech than any parrot in the world. It is very temperamental, however. I never dreamed that it would fool any one by its idiotic laughter. It always laughs that way when it becomes excited, you know. It is a very common bird in India and Persia, Mr. Fainer."

He went on as he lolled at ease, a smile playing about his stern mouth.

He admitted readily that he had charged the fence from the conduit that came over the mountains as one of the first luxuries of the valley. It was only on at night and always there was a guard at the gate, standing by to throw up a switch in case any one came who was not of the mysterious enemy.

He was very surprized that we had got in without being seen. Neither he nor Fainer knew anything of the dead guard at the gate, although Fainer did tell him of seeing a huddled body there.

The fence was a dangerous necessity, Hempster claimed. He offered no excuse for it. He had been a soldier in a land where the theory of might is right is a practise.

There was a short silence—perhaps Fainer made some inconsequential remark, perhaps they just sat there without words as two men may well do when one of them is thinking memories that are not the happiest.

Then Hempster suddenly began to mention the "enemy." I remember so well how Fainer told us about it. He was a bit bewildered about the information he had gathered, but he informed us that Hempster seemed surprized at himself for mentioning it.

My mind flies back to how he must have said it. He was English but he had been long away from his native tongue and during his exile he had gained much from his reading.

"In America you never deal with such things, unless, perhaps, in a very distant way, it is the Black Hand. You wouldn't know just how to handle the kind of an enemy I have had against me so long. A sheriff and a few deputies—what use in even asking them to help? What the troops of the Crown were unable to do in India a few cowboys could hardly do here. So I did not bother them.

"I'm a trained soldier, Mr. Fainer, and the tactician can make a retreat with honor—if he is to return and fight again. I have always fought my own battles, Mr. Fainer. It would be cowardly on my part to invite your sheriff to this fight."

There was a silence again in that little shack under the water-tank as Fainer stopped and brought me away from the picture of the camp around the filthy little pool in the mountains. Payne still sat watching the dirt floor. Old Joe was eager for more. I was bleary-eyed but fully awake, watching Fainer's face and pleading for more details.

"But, heavens, Fainer, he said more about the 'enemy' and who they were and what made him leave India? Wasn't he ever moody; didn't he tell you something about a trunk of old-fashioned women's clothing?"

"Why, I never seen such a down-in-the-mouth fella," Fainer said. "An' he did say somethin' 'bout girl's clothes or somethin'. Lemme see. Oh, yes."

Then he told me what I had been waiting for.

Hempster, after being morose all day, came suddenly to Fainer just as the sun was going behind the ridge above them and sat down with his back against the same boulder. He wanted to talk to a man of his own blood. He was so very lonely.

He had been in India, he told Fainer, almost thirty-five years, most of the time in Shahgarpore, in the Nizam's Dominions of Dekkan, a feudal state not under British rule exactly but in which England has had much to contend with. He became after many, many years English Resident, whose polite business it was to preserve loyal relations with the least friction.

There he had married a young Bora Majee girl of immensely proud family. He was not to go home to England; he had left Oxford under a cloud. He expected to die in India.

"I married her," I know now he must have spoken solemnly, "with as much love in my heart as any youth ever held. There was no return. I did not know it for two years. The child born to my wife had no white in him. I knew it the first time I saw him.

"Despite my expulsion from home, I was proud. I watched. There was a Poresh Patni. He controlled the Serochi, a tribe something like the dacoits of Bengal who were robbers by profession and birth and who formed regular communities founded entirely on the plunder they got as far away as Calcutta.

"The Serochi were brave to infatuation, and Poresh Patni was the bravest, the most ambitious of them all—and the most cunning. My government had been fighting him outside of the Dekkan for twelve years.

"One night I returned and found her gone. Child died of exposure later on. It is easy to trace a woman of the higher class in Shahgarpore, especially when she had fled with one of such prominence as the leader of the Serochi. I did——

"Well, this is about thirty years ago, Mr. Fainer. It was before I had become full English Resident. We are steadfast people, we English, in our loves."

And he had suddenly arisen and walked away slowly into the darkness. That was the last time Fainer saw him. The next morning, he and the Hindu guard started for Paradise Wells.

That was the complete story, as far as the rancher had obtained it.

"Tomorrow, Webbie," said the sheriff, "you better go on to the coast and see about this fella you know thar. We got ta know more about him ta clear this up. I'd like ta know a little somethin' more about this enemy. I don't see no sense wastin' time chasin' him in them mountains. Looks ta me somethin' more important in town. Baldy and me'll return. Lucky we got the extra saddle. You're a'right fer water now on. We'll take the buckboard back. Mebbe we kin find that boy."

"WEBSTER! The same inquisitive nose and pop eyes and quarter-moon smile!"

"Gannon! Same old solemn Britisher, who couldn't play poker or the señoritas!"

"Same old liar!"

This on meeting for the first time in six years! Only good friends can insult like that—especially when one is English.

We shook hands and beamed at each other like fraternity boys at a reunion and he dragged me past an irritated and somewhat straight-backed stenographer into the office of Court Gannon, chief clerk, H. M. Consular Service.

"You look like a burned mess, old fellow," said Gannon with one of his anxious looks of alarm. "Don't tell me, old thing, you have had a touch of consumption!"

"No, I'm just a lean desert rat, Court. Ranching in the Miraculo Valley."

There was a look of relief on his honest face.

"Don't tell me you have stopped writing those —— illogical newspaper dispatches with the goodness gracious openings!"

That was an old and happy feud between Gannon and myself, dating back to the war when we had filed rival dispatches side by side and it only served to strengthen our friendship. When Teddy went up San Juan, Gannon finally boosted him over the grade in the last paragraph of eight thousand words of the most perfect English and rhetoric after opening with three paragraphs of the weather before the battle. I filed a skeleton cable of one thousand words that read into five thousand in New York City. Mine, I must admit, was only newspaper writing while dear old Court's was journalism.

"I think I'm making a story now," I told Court, "and some day perhaps you are to be a character in it. But don't look so startled. You will be very minor indeed. Remove the flattered grin."

"Fitting, sir. Now put your fingers around this. The soda is at your elbow. Now what is bothering your shabby old conscience, old fellow?"

I poured out his Scotch and my story.

"Mr. Caldwell Hempster," said the Chief Clerk, when I concluded, "is very well known indeed to this office; in fact, I might say to the string of similar offices upon which the sun never sets. He has the C.S.I., third class, in other words he is a companion in the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India and is carrying with him the five-ray star of diamonds."

" 'Tha's good!' as my sheriff says," I explained. "But we have here real Five Star and it's better than diamonds. But I've told you what I want to know, so unburden, please. Take it slow, because I'm staying only to hear your info and your Scotch is of great excellency and, I take it from a man of your position, quantity."

"Then may much of my quantity go back with you to your arid Valley of Remorse," offered the gracious Gannon. "But let me start with the admonition, sir, that your glass is carelessly empty."

Gannon spoke as he wrote dispatches, so I translate into "American" his information as follows:

Out of college in disgrace, Hempster stood before a red-faced father and was handed a ticket to India. He was a black-sheep. He was being exiled. No, not even a remittance man. Pinned to the ship ticket was an appointment as assistant secretary to the third assistant of an English Resident. The destination was Dekkan.

"One hundred miles off the end of the world," the boy must have muttered.

He landed at Calcutta and went about a thousand miles. It was off the end of the world for him. He knew that when he saw the heartless mountains, the mysterious jungles and the cunning in the faces of the Serochi that had overrun the province.

He was young, morose and felt that he had been too severely punished, but he was loyal to his family training and he settled down determined to reach the top of his enforced profession—and never return home.

He was capable, brilliant. He was ushered into secret service and made a big success of it. Later he found himself back in the province as third assistant English Resident. The steps to the top were disease, murder, the weather; steps taken by agencies outside of his sphere.

The Serochi were the most troublesome under the native government that was enjoying the illusion of independent political life. There was the general anti-British sentiment everywhere, but Hempster was prepared for that. Long before he had become the Resident, he had been actively in charge, his chief hating his work and being allowed to make long trips home.

Hempster found the hearts of the Bora Majee for his own protection. They were the minority class that had fought for enlightenment for centuries. He deliberately joined them.

Then, three years later, he asked for the hand of Ballal Seng's daughter and received it. The girl had never wished it that way. She was impulsive under her cloak of native submission and it was Poresh Patni to whom she looked with the eyes of romantic girlhood.

Patni had looked toward her, too, but it was not with the eyes of a lover but those of a seeker after control of wealth and position. The Bora Majee had controlled the region by family right, and wealth had been theirs for centuries. It was only in recent years that pestilence had reduced them and left them rulers only in name. Now, although viciously in control, the Serochi feared the British outside the province too greatly to risk revolution.

Two days after the wedding, the Serochi, led by Poresh Patni, disappointed suitor, threw a mob into the palace and burned it. Ballal Seng and his only son died defending their home.

Under cover of being attacked, Hempster threw his small detachment of guards into the fight, gathered the scattered Bora Majee and cleared the village. Looking about him he found no spoils of victory, rather the dubious honor of now being wedded to the ruling survivor of little Shahgarpore.

Hempster was a born soldier, although he had never been trained as one, and he hated to call for troops. As a result he was able to control the situation and do little more for the next two years.

He accepted rulership of the little tribe, not that he wanted honor or authority, for there was none, but because he knew he would never return home and he had to appease his pride by trying to pick full victory out of what was obviously just delayed defeat. He had the best of England brought to his bride. She wore European clothes. He thought it was to please him. Then one day came an heir to the old throne, now just a name. The palace was a hut; the baby's heritage—death.

The Serochi had quieted down for

months before the birth. Poresh Patni withdrew his bandits but he himself remained. Hempster felt his forces too weak to arrest him. He feared the consequences more than any battle that might attend the apprehension. One thing he did not want was interference from outside troops, for he desired it to be believed outside that he was still in command.

Ugly rumors began to come to his ears, but he was already making his own rumors since he had looked upon the child. It was full native. But he loved the girl too much to go to her and wring a confession. And until he had verified the rumor he felt he could not go to Poresh Patni and kill him.

Then came the elopement.

He followed. There was a shooting in a charcoal burner's hut—Gannon was not very sure just what, it was so very long ago, of course; hearsay—but Poresh Patni was in it and Hempster's wife dead.

It resulted in open war. Hempster threw his pride to the winds and called for troops. They rushed in, eager for blood after long months of stagnation in barracks. The English Resident went out with them and ruthlessly took his revenge. There was terrifying slaughter.

Patni and his men fled to the jungles. The troops returned gorged.

Then started a campaign of revenge by the surviving Serochi that had never been equaled in the history of Shahgarpore. It was pitiless: It was a sentry dead in the morning; a lighted brand on the roof of a hut in the dead of night and a scattered slaying in its glow; there was poisoned food and water. One day a box, cleverly stamped and sealed as if from England, held a cobra—but it had been suffocated. Twenty years of it. Relentless.

Hempster found himself surrounded by an adamantine chain of the surviving Bora Majee. One night he lay weakened with fever on a cot. Twenty years had taken their toll. He sent a courier asking for medical aid. It came and he was ordered home to die. He defied the medical men to send him home. His father was still alive, and he said he would commit suicide when the boat was leaving shore.

A man must be humored after he has been in the Dekkan twenty years, especially when he has won recognition from the queen, no matter how trivial the recognition may be. Perhaps Egypt would be the best place after all. There was desert there. Parts of it had a similar climate. He had a recurrent fever that he could never survive except where the heat was tremendous.

Hempster refused to move, but one day the doctor came in with an old campaigner who had fallen in disgrace at some outpost and who, too, didn't want to go home. The doctor introduced him as the new Resident. Hempster argued no more. It was an order now.

But what of the little band that was left at his side? They were a handful now, and for twenty years they had been battling with him a fervent war. They knew no other leader. Well, he was a wealthy Englishman after all and could have retainers.

His band followed him to Egypt.

And in Egypt peace for one month. Hempster, looking one night through the little leather trunk in which he had brought only mementoes of his wife—the clothes she had worn on the night of the elopement, the little pearl-handled revolver found in her hand in the hut—heard a shot. One of his men, bringing in water, had been killed.

Then came poisoned water and food. A fire at night. Another guard slain.

Hempster hated to give up. He wanted to fight, but he was a very sick man now and outnumbered, although he soon discovered the Poresh Patni crowd were thinning, too. He lost no time wondering why he was being pursued with such deadly vengeance. He knew the product of India's hatreds. He knew it would last until the Serochi or the Bora Majee was wiped out. It was feud to the last man, no truce, no quarter: Either entire annihilation or total victory.

He took his case to the government at Cairo, and he was a little shamefaced. He wasn't laughed at. No man is when he has received citation from the queen. But he was asked drily by the physician what books he had been reading. Revenge plots? Such bally rot! Well, twenty years in the Nizam's Dominions of Dekkan would do anything to a white man. Needed a change. Try the United States. Entertainment there, and it certainly had deserts in the southwest somewhere to help out on that fever.

He wrote home to his brother for the

first time in many years. A letter came, telling him his father had gone on and containing a patrimony that would keep him in splendor for the rest of his life. There was no invitation in it, however, to come home. Apparently his reputation had grown with the years. A glow of warmth came to his heart, though, when it was mentioned his father had prayed for him at the end and made him an heir.

The little band went to San Diego. The fever came again. He advised with the Home Office. It had best be Miraculo Valley. That had a climate closest to India's of any spot in the Americas.

He sent his followers to prepare a home.

"AND you believe, do you, Court, that the 'enemy' is still relentlessly trailing this poor ——?"

"You say he said as much to this chap, Mr. Fainer, when they were in the mountains. From what I have heard of the case, I would say they were—and are organized right in your own town!"

"You startle me, Court. It all sounds so ridiculous."

"You don't know your India. In fact, as my newsboy on the corner says, 'You don't know nothin', sir!' "

"But *I* know I don't, sir."

We had begun the old banter, and it was early morning when we marched a trifle too dignified to the stable where I had left my horse. There the young chief clerk sang "My Warrior Rides into the Night" in a beautiful English falsetto, and I responded with bits from the "Charge of the Light Brigade."

But this is giving away information of the British Secret Service.

The information I brought back to the county jail was of more value than Sheriff Payne had hoped for. Fainer had anticipated my return and was in from his ranch to greet me. The first announcement before the four of us sat down to talk it over was that no trace of Hentry had been found.

"The jail delivery," said the sheriff, "backs yer frien's idear that them fellas are near town. We can forget entirely about them Englishers now and go atter that boy."

"It's agreed," I suggested, "that all of us are in on this to the end of it, Payne? The boy was our friend. Let's work quietly and above all not let the town in."

"Since the poor kid's been gone," put in Jones, "thar ain't been no paper come out to give any dope on it."

A dying newspaper! It made my fingers itch to give it a hypodermic.

"Hentry was a sick boy," I contributed, "and I happen to know he put every cent he had in the world into that little weekly. Now to keep any one else from reopening it and perhaps spilling a lot about this case I hereby nominate and elect myself editor in chief, reporter, compositor, pressman and printers' devil of the Miraculo *Argus*, 'the only nespaper in the world published ninety-one feet below sea level.' "

Fainer's ready hand went into his pocket.

"Here's a-somethin', Webbie. Buy pencils, ink and things to keep it goin' fer the kid. There's more in the bank."

"Thanks," I said, taking enough from him to stall off any collectors that might come in on the evening train. "That's worth a personal on the front page."

"Thar's good reason for ta keep this quiet," the sheriff went on. "The one thing that will work this —— puzzle out is secrecy. I got a idear this gang Webbie says is near town has lot a spies workin' an' they would sure do away with the kid, providin' they got him o' course, if the whole town got wind of what's happened. Somethin's gotta turn up. If the boy's dead, he's dead, an' thar ain't much ta do to help him. But if he ain't then he's a'right, I think, until we git a line on 'em."

"Then it's everybody back ta reg'lar jobs," said Fainer.

"Yea," rejoined the sheriff, "but with one eye a-snoopin' all the time."

SO THAT night I took off almost fifteen years with my shirt and found myself slipping dirty fingers over type as I had done when a boy in my father's shop. The night breeze had come late that evening and, therefore, so had work over the forms.

It must have been past midnight when I heard in the silence that only comes to a desert town a short, shrill whistle outside the open door.

I jumped, and the stickful of pica suddenly pied in my hand and scattered to the floor. I leaned back against the stone in an effort to conceal my hand as it went to my revolver in my hip pocket. Then I waited.

Just a dead silence. Then the fall of a

folded paper that sounded like a thud on my straining nerves as it fluttered to the floor inside the door. Above my hard breathing came the sound of running feet outside.

With my revolver in hand, I edged my way to the wall and toward the door. I waited there. Then I slunk toward the paper, grasped it and slammed the door.

With hands shaking from the suddenness of it all, I pulled open the folds and saw the neat scrawl that I recognized instinctively as that of a copy-desk man.

It was addressed to me!

I read it. From Hentry!

I rushed across the road and to the jail and pounded on the door. Jones and the sheriff thrust naked torsos from the side window. Then they let me in.

We gathered in the little office and read over the skeleton dispatch.

WEBBIE: Climb top ye village bell tower, sight directly Methodist church spire. Then looking directly me. 4 miles. Adobe, dark brown, story & half, front porch only, uncut wheat around entire. Held Hindu gang of 15. Vicious leader. Sick. You'll do what can, know. Friend family kid here. Afraid jail. Deliver my office. Know somehow you there. Keeping rag going. All us that way. LOR.

That called for action.

"I climb ta repair that bell at dawn," whispered the sheriff, excited more than I had ever seen him. "Jones, you get Fainer, —— quick. He'd never forgive us if we didn't let him in on this. We'll hit that place like four ton o' brick from the sky tomorrow night. An' thar's goin' ta be —— ta pay!"

"And I'm going back and get the kid's paper out. Going to leave the front page open for an extra!"

But as I left the door, I heard the muffled clattering of a horse coming down the dusty road. Jones and Payne joined me at the door to welcome Fainer as he swung off his horse and sprang up the stairs.

"Hempster's on his way in with his gang! Rushed in ta tell ya. The same un that guarded me ta the Wells from the mountains dropped in on me half-hour ago. Don't care nothin' 'bout a fella's sleep. Advance guard, sorta."

We gathered around him, bewildered at the sudden turn of affairs.

"What's the idear, Hempster comin' in?" asked Payne.

"Wouldn't say. This Hindu just banged on my door and I let him in with a gun at his head. Said he wanted me ta see you and get yer word his boss could return and be let alone fer five days. After that would surrender and take his medicine—if he lived. Talked about honor o' Englisher an' all that stuff.

"Wouldn't say why the five days, but I got hunch the dude is takin' the law into his own hands. He's that sort o' fella."

"The trained soldier retreats with honor—to return and fight again," I repeated, recalling Hempster's own words. "Remember, Fainer, you said he spoke of it."

"What did you tell this Hindu, Fainer?" asked the sheriff.

"Told him ta go back and tell his boss ta get the —— back where he belonged. That we didn't need or want him and mebbe we'd nab him if he showed up."

"You done right. The meetin' o' them two clans means only a lot a blood spilled. An' what did the fella say when he left?"

"Said —— sorry, but Hempster was already movin' in!"

"Then we mebbe beat him ta it and mebbe not. We have a line at last on where the kid is held captive, Fainer, and oughta hit 'em within twenty-four hours. Did he say how long ago the Englisher started his march in?"

"No. Very wise fella. Soon's I wouldn't give him what he wanted he said it was too late anyway and left."

"Well, nothing can be done until dawn anyway," continued Payne. "We'll sight where the kid is then. Now let's go in and get some sleep fer tomorrow."

But the *Argus* had not "been put to bed" yet, and until it was I could not sleep. I went back to the office, while the sheriff and Jones took Fainer inside to tell him of my letter.

Morning came as I was locking up the three forms of "grape," "boiler plate" and ads. The fourth, page one, I decided to hold for the story the editor would write upon his return. I was shocked to find suddenly in my hand the solid border plate for obituaries. I flung it into a corner.

Then I went across the street to meet Jones climbing down from the tower. Sheriff Payne and Fainer waited at the foot of the ladder.

"The Lee Weng joint," the deputy reported. " 'Member where the chinks used axes on each other over a two-bit debt? Some Hindus leased it from the heirs six months ago. It's a tough nut to crack."

"We can sneak in through the wheat," said Payne, "unless the guards are too sharp, and wait till night and then open up. I know the place well, every room in that house. I learnt it —— well on the chink trouble investigation."

"Fifteen a them, the kid's funny letter said," Fainer reminded us. "We're only four."

Payne thought a moment.

"Tha's bad! Jones, get me about four more good boys somewheres."

"I know 'em," the deputy informed him. "Young rancher fellas that bin in the cow country with me. What we want, eh, chief? I know two hundred other guys lookin' fer excitement. I'll get four inside a hour, tough fellas who can get goin' without too much spur and also keep the old gab shut."

He went to his horse.

WHEN one wanders the earth, as I have done since that night and its following day, he comes upon many experiences, but I know now that running with the rabble before a victorious vagabond army in Mexico, a hold-up by grinning bandits in the Andes, a gun fight in a Nevada bar room, a retreat with typhus ridden divisions in Russia have not etched in my memory as has the battle at the old chink ranch.

I can see now the four young ex-cowboys, jumpy with excitement and looking forward to gun-play like schoolgirls to a Saturday matinée—youngsters that were pioneers as much as the forty-niners of California—Sheriff Payne, Jones, Fainer and myself, slumping on our horses along the dusty road with a vividness that no other memory can efface. But it was the events that were to follow that ride that have printed the night so indelibly in my mind.

We went down the old county trail toward Baxter just after sundown, our posse split in four, and with plans to surround the house on each side with two men. We had our watches set together to the second, and at nine we were to close in when Payne revealed himself to call for the surrender of the unknown leader.

I was paired with a young fellow named Crowley, who had been chasing cows in Wyoming, and there was a certain security of feeling to me in the careless way he swung his gun-laden hips. Payne had the west side, Fainer the north and Jones the east, each with a rancher. We had the south.

As the sun was leaving the heavens, Crowley and I came out of an alfalfa field and went into the wheat on our hands and knees. We had left our mounts at a ranch a mile back. There we lay for almost an hour, awaiting the creeping darkness. The stillness was awful and the lack of a smoke nerve-rending. We could not even see the house.

Holding my watch in my hand I saw its hands creep to our zero hour. I waved to Crowley and began to crawl.

As we parted the dry wheat, my heart thumped in my breast as I caught in the western glow of the sky the figure of Payne arising from the grain.

"Hello, there! Who lives here?"

No answer. The windows suddenly went black. I saw a figure, apparently a guard that had been asleep, scurry into the rear door that faced in my direction.

"This is Sheriff Payne speakin'. I want the owner of this place ta come out. Don't bother ta raise no rumpus. I have you surrounded. Come out!"

No answer. Silence for almost a minute. Then a tiny sheet of flame and a crash of a rifle at a window. I saw Payne crumple back into the wheat.

The shout of Jones from the east:

"They've got Payne, the dirty ——! Shoot every —— that comes out! No quarter!"

"Easy, Jones! Ain't shot bad. I'm good yet!"

Payne blazed twice with his revolver and then was gone again into the grain.

Firing from the house suddenly became general. Crowley and I returned it aimlessly and fell on our faces.

"Crawl like ——!" called the young rancher. "Don't never shoot twict from same place. Fire an' run!"

I took his advice.

"Hold yer sides!"

The strong voice of Payne came clear, cheering our hearts and steadying our hands.

"Boy, I got six straight bullets back in each gun right now," whispered Crowley, who had crawled to me, "an' I bet they make a break right this way!"

He had uttered a prophecy that came true almost on top of his words.

I saw a head at a window and fired. A scream. And as if it were a signal, four came out from the rear door, firing right and left. I heard the guns of Crowley at my ear and saw two go down.

Firing broke out at the front. The remaining two on our side dropped to the ground and out of view. We dared not stand up to fire. I felt my spine crawl suddenly as I realized in a moment I might come face to face with some of them in the wheat. It would be a matter then of who caught the other fellow first.

"Crawl at 'em and get the first shot!"

It was Crowley speeding on his hands and knees toward the house. I paused to reload and followed.

Suddenly I found the opening. I was alone. Less than twenty feet away was the back door. A movement in the grain at my back caught my ear. I swung and blazed straight into a dark face. There was no return.

As I turned again I saw figures pouring from the door, lighting their way wierdly by sharp flashes from the guns they held in their hands. They fled past me as I held my fire. They were eight to one and had me enclosed.

Somewhere in the grass behind me Crowley and some one fell upon each other too close. I heard two shots there almost as one, and then the thrashing of two bodies rolling about. I turned to go to his assistance. Another shot and a wisp of wheat was clipped from before my face. I was caught front and rear.

I jumped to my feet and rushed into the house. No shots. My dash must have been too sudden, or they were going the other way. I fell inside the door.

It was so dark inside I could not see the walls. Nothing moved. From outside came the desultory fighting that sounded now strangely far away. I groped my way forward. I had no way of determining how many had made the dash from the two doors.

Then I pressed against a panel and it gave. I stood there holding my breath. To go out of the house was death. I stepped forward. Then came the shock of a body hurled against mine. We clinched and rolled down together, my gun knocked from my hand. I got his throat. A final gasp and a weakening. I flung him loose and tried to find the wall.

A sharp metallic cough!

"Lor! Good God, boy!"

I found him. He clung to me.

"It's Webbie," I whispered.

Poor, weak lad. He clung to me, gasping and coughing deep from his lungs.

"I was going to get out!" he muttered. "Where are we?"

"In a sort of storeroom off kitchen. What's the fight?"

"Payne and seven of us."

"I woke up with the first shots, I guess. If I had only known it was you for sure I would have made a break for it, but I thought it was the other gang come back to start the feud again. But you're here, Webbie. I knew you would come when you got the letter."

"Any one still in the house, you think?"

"Yes, one, Webbie, I'm sure. They're pretty crafty. I heard some of them go out, but I think one is still on the lower floor somewhere. We'd better wait our chance, don't you think? I'm low, Webbie."

We searched for my gun and found it. Then we fell to whispering in each other's ear.

"It was those —— divorce papers I had. The state seal, fancy stamps, signatures did the trick against me," he said. "They grabbed me just after I left you at the fight. Got an awful wallop and went out. I was dragged away and there was a parley over me after they had got away from the ranch a short distance. I had nothing to prove who I was. The badge meant nothing. Thought I was U. S. Secret Service, and they were in the fight to the finish and didn't care about government men, except thought it best not to kill one. So I was brought here. Just threw me in here and fed me under a guard. Damp hole. Made me pretty sick, Webbie."

"We'll try to get you out, boy. The door I came in is up these stairs and then to the left, I take it."

"Right."

I got him on my back. He was too weak to walk. He had suddenly gone under the strain.

"Hold tight, Lor; can you?"

No answer. Just the limp body on my back. I staggered up, my left arm grasping his two hands below my chin. My revolver was in my right. We reached the door and were met with a dozen shots. I stepped back.

"This is ——, Lor. Now our crowd will pick us, too!"

A sound behind me in the house came to me as I knelt over him. It was slippered feet. I dragged him back to the door. The light of the doorway must not be at our backs. I braced myself as I heard the steps come on.

Suddenly that cough at my feet!

My eyes went blind at the flash in the doorway of the room. It was aimed at the sound on the floor. The boy clutched my leg with a grip of iron and then fell away. I realized suddenly he was hit.

Standing over him, I squeezed the revolver empty in one stream of lead. A body went softly to the floor. I lifted the boy again and stepped over the still form.

"This is the sheriff!" said a voice sharply at the rear door.

"This is Webster, Payne!"

He stepped in.

"I've got Hentry here. He's shot!"

"Tha's bad! What I jus' stumbled on?"

"Don't know. Just shot it."

"Um. There's —— outside. All mixed up. I want ta clean out the house. Too many fer us if they have us both back and front. But Fainer and Jones are sure raisin' Cain with their crews! I'm shootin' with my left. Not very good."

"The boy said he was sure this dead one here was the last in here. Let's break."

"Tha's good!"

"Help me put the boy on my back."

Payne put his good arm down to him. There was a moment of hesitation. Then he said:

"No use. Only bother now."

I felt strangely sick.

"Get out o' here!" roared Payne.

I SLUNK to the door. There we went down on our hands and knees and slid into the darkness outside. The grain was made without a shot.

"As I guessed," whispered Payne. "They're on the run, but the boys're sticking with 'em."

We heard firing break out again at our right and draw nearer.

"Tha's heavy!" muttered Payne in surprize. "We've got ta fight and fight like —— now. We're 'tween 'em and the house and I think they're tryin' ta make it back again."

We moved on for better positions. Suddenly the sounds of feet thrashing about. Firing again, close at hand now.

"Hold it," commanded the sheriff. "Can't tell who ta hit. Let 'em make the house. I'd rather have 'em together again than shoot any our boys. Get 'em all in the mornin'."

Forms dashed forward, firing back as they ran. They were very few. One fell. I crawled over and found him wounded. I covered him.

"You Serochi?"

"No. Bora Majee."

Hempster's man!

This was getting confusing indeed.

I told him who I was.

"He's Hempster man!" I called.

But a heavy fusillade had started from the house and the sheriff was gone. It fell silent.

"This is Sheriff Payne!" I heard roared near the house.

"Jones!" came back a yell from a window. "I got all 'counted fer, chief, except that —— leader we was after! Gang of Hempster's with me in here. Met 'em out in the field an' they joined up."

"Where's Hempster?"

"Don't know."

"How many hurt?"

"Got two o' the fellas with us. Not bad, and Fainer lost finger or somethin'. Lotta hurt Hindus 'bout. Some other white guys come over during the fight and joined too."

I saw the sheriff dash into the house. I turned and ran toward it through the wheat.

As I broke through I plunged my foot into a body and went down flat. I lifted my eyes and stared blankly into those of the Englishman who lay there like a snake. He had a gun under my chin.

"I'm with the sheriff!" I gasped.

"I'm Hempster!"

"Thank ——, you are!"

"Don't talk so loud!" he commanded.

"It's all over," I said.

"Over ——! Get back!"

He dragged me aside savagely and crawled away.

Perhaps it was the look in those burning eyes or just man's innate curiosity, but I found myself crawling my way after him as if my life depended upon it. For fifty yards we crawled like two tigers on the hunt and then he stopped short.

I saw a figure rear up and two flashes of flare in rapid succession turned on the crouched figure before me. Hempster calmly came to one knee. Then he deliberately took aim and fired once.

Against the glow of the coming crescent I saw the figure in front of us jerk and then crumple in a heap.

Hempster looked at his revolver and flung it away.

"You are right," he muttered. "It is over!"

MEMORIES are pitiless things. Those that are the cruelest are the strongest and hold to one with barbed tentacles. Perhaps that is why, almost twenty years later, I can remember the very words Hempster said to me that night two hours after the shooting as we sat beside a cot, in the jail office.

Lor Hentry lay there, unconscious, a harsh rattle deep in his throat. Hempster sat beside me on a cane chair. Across the cot stood the town's physician. He was very grave. Suddenly he bent down and listened at the boy's mouth. He shook his head as he straightened.

"An hour at the most. No use, gentlemen. You can perhaps take some relief in that consumption had him beyond aid before he was shot. He was never one that would take care of himself. I must go now to visit the others."

It was a very definite speech.

Hempster sat stony-faced, staring at the bare, white-washed walls of the room. I felt his deep mood as mine.

Suddenly the doctor was gone and I was hearing Hempster's soft drawl:

"This is something that stirs cruel memories, Mr. Webster. Once before I sat beside a bed and watched a handsome face like this. That was a woman. She was in the throes of death, too."

I nodded and turned away my eyes.

"There was a little pearl-handled revolver on the floor," he went on. "Self-death, we called it there in India. Fled with Poresh Patni. Heat insanity, my kind friends called it. I overtook them outside of Shahgarpore in a charcoal burner's hut, but Poresh had seen me coming and fled. She saw me, too, and—well, I had married her out of a proud Bora Majee family, and she could not face disgrace."

I bowed my head.

"We are strange people who are forced to spend our lives in the jungle mountains of India, Mr. Webster," he continued. "I have carried many years some things of hers that I might touch and see them when I was lonely, the clothes she wore that night, her head-dress, the revolver, in a trunk. It is impossible to forget."

We had now come to the end of the story.

"And this Poresh Patni," I murmured, "got away?"

"Until two hours ago," said Caldwell Hempster.

THE CAMP-FIRE

A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

A BIT more in the controversy as to whether Wounded Knee was a battle or a massacre:

San Diego, California.

Referring to the letter from Mr. James Rall about the battle? or massacre? of Wounded Knee which was published in "Camp-Fire" July 20, 1923, number.

I was then in Logan County, N. D., and the event was naturally discussed quite often in that section. Both there and at Fort Yates the comments that I overheard matched perfectly with Mr. Rall's information. It was commonly spoken of as the Wounded Knee Massacre, and never, to my knowledge, was it referred to as a "battle."—NORMAN S. GOODSILL.

SOMETHING concerning his story in this issue from Alanson Skinner, who, as some of you know, is curator of the Department of Anthropology in the Public Museum of the City of Milwaukee:

Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

A few years ago I had the privilege of working for a summer helping to excavate the ruins of Hawikuh, an ancient Zuñi Indian pueblo ruin some eighteen miles south of Zuñi, N. M. This ancient city is one captured by Coronado from the Zuñi in 1540, and destroyed by the Apache about 130 years later. We employed a dozen or a dozen and a half of the Zuñi to assist us, and I soon became quite intimate with them, and so came to hear the story of "The Well in the Desert" from one of the older men.

THE whole life of the Pueblo Indians, no matter what tribe, is centered on obtaining sufficient rainfall to secure their crops, so that the whole year is devoted to a succession of ceremonies of supplication for rain, conducted by various societies in rotation. The Kawkokshi Society, mentioned in the text of my story is one of these, and I had frequent opportunity to observe their rites, both when performing their dances in public, and in their lodge-room or *estufa*, where they seldom allow visitors. Like most Pueblo tribes the Zuñi wear strange masks and impersonate various supernatural characters or gods during their public performances. The Clowns or Mudheads, of whom my old Indian friend was the leader on alternate years, accompany the members of the societies to the plazas when they dance, and grotesquely imitate their rites. They also amuse the crowd of onlookers when the performers have retired, to hold them throughout the interval until the dancers appear again. Their office, that of the clowns, I mean, is an ancient and very honorable one, but bears its obligations also, among them the twain that are mentioned in this tale, tolerance and good humor.

The Priests of the Bow form another of the many Zuñi secret organizations. To become a member it is necessary, among other things, to present the members with a human scalp of your own taking. My old friend tells me that he had slain seven Navaho, so it is evident that he had no difficulty in gaining admission.

The famous pioneer ethnologist, Frank Hamilton Cushing, who long dwelt with the Zuñi and learned their language perfectly, was made a member of this society and gained admission by presenting a scalp which he was supposed to have garnered in himself when on the warpath. However, it was furnished him by the U. S. National Museum, I am told. At any rate the Zuñi now know that he did not take it himself, and to this omission they attribute his untimely death.—ALANSON SKINNER.

DO ANIMALS think? And, to carry it a step farther, do plants?

Nutley, New Jersey.

I noticed in *Adventure* a letter from J. A. McCarty relating to the intelligence and thinking power of animals. I hope what follows may throw at least a little light on this endless discussion.

It is quite well known that intelligence and mentality depend upon the organized nervous system, comprising the brain and nerves, electrically connected, forming altogether one electric unit. That all animals have a somewhat similar electric, organic, nervous system, though in the lower grades more or less rudimentary, in the lowest grade very rudimentary; but acting in the same way through the same agency.

Therefore it would seem evident that the intelligence or mentality of all animals must be fundamentally the same, the difference being one of degree, depending on the development of their thinking apparatus. There are dogs that can think better than some people.

People are always arrogating to themselves superexcellencies to which they are not entitled. Even vegetation seems to show some intelligence or instinct. I have noticed that, in some way, the stupid people are the most conceited.—JOSEPH KINGSLAND.

AT A former Camp-Fire we heard a criticism of the late Emerson Hough's book, "North of 36," by Stuart Henry in the *Literary Digest International Book Review*, arraigning Mr. Hough for what it claimed was an untrue picture of the West in the early cattle-driving days. *Adventure* appealed to those of its readers who had lived in the West, had helped make it and were, and are, part of it, asking them to give judgment. These old-timers, speaking from first-hand knowledge, constitute the best court in the world for passing judgment on the historical accuracy of both Mr. Hough's book and Mr. Henry's statements concerning it.

These old-timers of the West responded heartily and their verdict has been almost unanimous. There seems no doubt that "North of 36" stands acquitted on the charge of having painted an untrue picture of the West of that day. Even the detailed and specific points raised by Mr. Henry are in most cases refuted and a frequent verdict given by these old-timers is that Mr. Henry is far less competent to speak concerning that period of the West's development than was Emerson Hough. Full allowance can be made for the fact that, quite aside from the question of accuracy, some of Mr. Henry's statements strongly offended these sons of the trail-driving days. Their natural resentment does not alter the facts they present.

It is also to be noted that the case has been tried for the most part without bringing into court in Mr. Hough's behalf the fictionist's generally acknowledged privilege of taking a certain amount of liberty with historical facts when weaving them into the web of his fiction. To this privilege Emerson Hough was of course entitled and the testimony seems to prove that he exercised it only in cases where the liberty taken does no violence to the essential truth of the picture as a whole.

QUITE aside from the question at issue, what these makers of the West have to say is of both interest and importance on its own account. It makes good reading, it is of decided historical value in preserving what may be called a composite picture of real conditions in those days by men who lived in them, and it serves the general reading public as a needed guide in assaying fiction dealing with the West.

The general tendency of fiction has been to exaggerate the wildness and woolliness of the West, past and present, until the public, not only of this country but of the world, has built up so melodramatic a concept that fiction faithfully portraying conditions actually seems to them unnatural and untrue. If an author desires to register on the general public as a reliable portrayer of the West he must shape his fiction to fit this exaggerated concept.

There has of late years been a reaction, but unfortunately it has gone to the opposite extreme and insists upon picturing the West far less wild and woolly than it really was. This is due partly to certain of the Westerners themselves, particularly in California, who feel it is to their interests to soft-pedal anything that might further entrench the Easterner in his odd belief that civilization decreases in direct proportion as one goes west from the Appalachian Mountains. But, also, it is partly due to the literary critics, the majority of whom are utterly ignorant of Western conditions either past or present—not only the professional critics but those who, denied print for expression, establish themselves as local arbiters in all things literary. An easy and very usual way for a critic to give himself importance in the eyes of the "common herd" is to assail something as cheap and inferior. Almost anything will do and it need not be really cheap or inferior. If he be a bit skilful he can accomplish still more notoriety by assailing something most people consider firmly established—for example, the exaggerated concept of the West, or some concept not at all exaggerated.

BUT if he desires notoriety for extreme superiority his easiest way is either to deify or to scorn all that is crude and rough. Either attitude will do. Either can, if he have medium ability, admit him to the intelligentzia. If he glorifies the crude, he need only insist that the only key to real understanding of life and art is concentration upon the world's sewage. If he scorns the crude, he need only insist that elementary passions with the crudities and action arising therefrom are utterly irreconcilable with art—that the only literature worth consideration is one consisting exclusively of refinements.

It is this last class who are, among other things, making the reaction against the exaggerated fiction concept of the West too extreme and rather absurd. In applying their theories they ignore the nature of the material. Rather usual is the sneering review of a Western story because of its abundance of action. These super-refined members of the intelligentzia forget, or more likely do not know, that the West had a very generous abundance of action all through its early days and that even now it has, compared with the East, more real action than they would consider properly literary. Incidentally, they forget also that action, being the crystallization of all psychology, may be, in really literary hands, the most refined and difficult material a writer can handle.

But the main point is that, not knowing the West and being absorbed in the business of being just as refined as possible, there is danger of their building in the public mind a picture of the West, particularly of the old West, that is unnaturally anemic and very untruthfully "literary." Therefore, as a guide to the general public in assaying fiction dealing with the West, the testimony of these old-timers, giving us the cold facts themselves, is of decided value.

As there are more letters than we can possibly make place for in one issue we will have what we can at this Camp-Fire and more in later issues. No particular order is followed in presenting them, but an effort is made to make each group at least roughly representative of the general opinion pro and con. The writers of these letters are well known in the Southwest; readers from other sections will find in each letter enough personal data to establish the writer's qualifications for speaking in this matter. Only brief introductions are necessary.

It should be added that since Mr. Henry's criticism appeared, the *International Book Review* has opened its pages to pioneers aud others presenting an opposite view.

A letter from W. D. Reynolds, vice-president of the Reynolds Cattle Company, Fort Worth, Texas:

Fort Worth, Texas.

I wish to call attention to some of the errors in the statement of Mr. Henry. I do not know the exact date that the first cattle were driven to Abilene, Kansas, but I do know that in 1867 conditions were ideal for handling large herds, and there have been herds of 4,000 and more driven up the Chisholm Trail. I went up this Trail myself in 1871 with a herd of 3,300. Prior to that time, in 1867, I went up the Pecos River to Colorado with a herd of 3,300 head belonging to Goodnight and Loving. We could have easily carried 5,000 head, for there was nothing in the way; no settlements and no range cattle, but plenty of water and grass. The same conditions prevailed on the Chisholm Trail.

MR. HENRY mentions Texans not considering themselves Americans and not celebrating the Fourth of July. My parents moved to Texas in 1847 when I was only one year old and, ever since I can remember, Texas people have been celebrating the Fourth of July. The people in this State came from other parts of the Union, consequently observed Independence Day as it was observed elsewhere in the United States. The fact that we celebrate our own Independence from Mexico (March 2nd) in no way interferes or detracts from the national holiday.

My brother, George T. Reynolds, was married in 1868 and went up the Pecos River Trail to Colorado that year and took his wife with him. He lived in Colorado for several years. I mention this to show that it was not only possible, but that women did make the trip up the Trail.

IN THE early seventies a lot of cattle were being driven to Ogalalla, Nebraska, a shipping point on the Union Pacific Railroad, and many of them were driven from there on north to Montana, Wyoming, the Dakotas and Canada. I have driven a number of herds myself to North Dakota, within forty miles of Canada. And two of my neighbors, H. W. Creswell and Tony Day, drove several herds on into Canada and established a ranch near Medicine Hat. Creswell died up in that country several years ago, and Tony Day was living in San Diego, California, the last time I heard of him.

As I have already stated, conditions in 1867 were ideal for driving large herds, but as the country became settled the size of herds had to be reduced until now, of course, it would be next to impossible to drive a herd of any size through, and the expense would be prohibitive. This is what I have to say regarding Henry's criticism.

IN ANSWER to question relative to an account of Oliver Loving's death, I will give you the facts as I know them. I went up the Trail in 1868 with a herd belonging to Goodnight and Loving. They took two herds up that year. Goodnight and Loving with the first herd. I was with the second, which was in charge of Joe Loving, a son of Oliver Loving. Our herd arrived at Fort Sumner about a month after the first herd reached there, and it was then that I learned the facts concerning the death of Loving, as I give them here.

When the first herd got some distance up the Pecos, Mr. Loving decided to go on ahead and find buyers for his cattle. He took Billy Wilson, a one-armed man, with him. Going on ahead, they came to a little stream called Black River, that flows into the Pecos from the west near Carlsbad, New Mexico. Here they were attacked by a bunch of Indians. The Indians ran them down to the Pecos River, just a short distance to the east, and Mr. Loving was wounded in the arm. Loving and Wilson jumped from their horses and hid in some undergrowth that looked like cane. Their horses and supplies were left for the Indians and they stayed in this hiding-place nearly all night. Loving was so weak from the loss of blood that he persuaded Billy Wilson to leave him and go back and meet the herd. Wilson slid into the stream and swam and floated down some distance to get out of the reach of the Indians. Then he got out on the same side that he went in on and made his way back to the road and followed it for two or three days, when he met their herd. During this time he was without food.

Before daylight, the next day after the Indian attack, Loving came out from the river to the road and started north towards Fort Sumner. He went about fourteen miles and found some Mexicans with oxcarts, and he got them to haul him to Fort Sumner, which they were many days in reaching. Before Mr. Loving found these Mexicans he was so weak from the loss of blood and lack of food that he built up a little fire and roasted his buckskin gloves into a crisp and ate them. When they reached Fort Sumner his arm was in such bad condition that the Army surgeon had to amputate it, and he soon died from blood-poison.

That winter, after Mr. Goodnight had disposed of his cattle and sent his outfit back, he bought an extra wagon and a pair of mules to carry the body of his partner back to Weatherford, Texas, where it was buried. When the party reached Fort Griffin I left them and went to my home which was near by. I remember that it was the 29th day of February, 1868.—W. D. REYNOLDS.

THANKS to the *Pioneer Magazine of Texas*, pubished in San Antonio, we are able to add to our own letters others printed by them, from the old-timers with whom they are so closely in touch.

This one is from George W. Saunders, president of the Old Time Trail Drivers of Texas:

IN THE "Trail Drivers of Texas" Vol. I and Vol. II, which I published, are contained hundreds of sketches from the pens of these old empire-builders, which will silence the battery of all such self-styled authorities.

Stuart Henry's attack on Emerson Hough's "North of 36" and "The Covered Wagon," teems with aspersions which look pale to real old pioneers and should not pass unanswered.

I WAS born within sixty miles of San Antonio, in 1854, raised on a cattle ranch, and drove the Northern trails from 1871 to 1886, am still in the cattle business and have kept in close touch with cattle movements from the Rio Grande to the Canadian line all this time. I have kept myself thoroughly informed upon conditions confronting the stockmen and the changes in the cattle business, and have been gathering data for my books since 1874. The critic writers can get more authentic information from the thousands of Old Trail Drivers still living in Texas than they can from Wild West stories and imagination.

Hough's "North of 36" was partly built from Vol. I of "The Trail Drivers of Texas," which he acknowledged he used for its authenticity, and his description of moving herds, habits and customs of cowboys can not be beat. Hough went among the pioneers and got his information. He once lived on a ranch in Bexar County, near San Antonio. Mr. Henry, I understand got his information in New York, and Paris, France. Andy Adams' "Log of a Cowboy" and other books, Charles Siringo's books, Rollins' book of cowboys, all describe ranch and trail life correctly. The former were old trail drivers.

STUART HENRY says almost no one now lives who saw the Chisholm Trail or that early village of Abilene, Kansas. There are thousands of men living that drove the Chisholm Trail and saw Abilene, Kansas, during the famous trail-driving days. Abilene was closed as a cattle market in 1874 and 1875. There were thirty-five thousand Texas cattle driven to Abilene in 1867; seventy-five thousand in 1868; one hundred and fifty thousand in 1869; two hundred and fifty thousand in 1870; and three hundred thousand in 1871.

From 1874 to 1875 three hundred and fifty thousand to four hundred and fifty thousand went to Abilene, Newton, Wichita and Great Bend, Kansas, each year, when the market moved to Dodge City, Kansas. The drives increased from 1875 to 1885. The drives numbered from three hundred and fifty to six hundred thousand per year. Drives were lighter after 1885, but the trail did not close until 1895.

Starting in 1867 and closing in 1895, it is estimated that there were 35,000 employed in this work. At least ten thousand are living yet, scattered over the world, but mostly in Texas. Young men that drove in the eighties and later range in age now from 55 to 65 years. They are identified with all industries of our country—leaders in all useful enterprises. I never heard of one being a sneak thief or a burglar. Their sons and grandsons number many thousands, and will keep the light of their ancestors burning for many years to come.

HENRY says the trail drivers did not recognize the Fourth of July; they claimed to be Texans, not Americans; had little use for the Stars and Stripes. He says the trailers left Abilene before the Fourth of July each year. It is well known that most of the early trail drivers held their cattle near Abilene until fat in summer and fall, then sold or shipped to market and the boys that could leave the herds celebrated the Fourth of July each year in Abilene.

IF HENRY were to make this statement in any cow camp in Texas—Hot Dog! He says the cattle trails did not reach within six hundred miles of the Canadian line. North and South Dakota, Wyoming and all the Western States were stocked with Texas cattle bought in the Kansas markets. He says forty-five hundred cattle could not be driven in one herd. Such herds were few, but I have known five thousand to be driven in one herd. He says the trail drivers and frontiersmen and their women folk were wizened, weary, forlorn, gaunt, lonely men and women, who lived sordid lives. This is proof he never was in Texas, where were bred the most patriotic protectors of American traditions—men who have answered willingly to every call made by our Government; men who forged to the front in every battle at and since the Alamo and San Jacinto; men who did not know what defeat meant.

ANOTHER statement by Mr. Henry which runs contrary to the facts is that no women went up the trail. Again is ignorance bliss. A number of women did go up the trail, notable among them being Mrs. Amanda Burks, who accompanied her husband on the trail from Corpus Christi to Abilene, Kansas. Her presence on that trip is cherished in the memory of the old-time trailers to this day. Not only during the days of the trail but ever since, she has befriended the old boys who visited her ranch near Cotulla, where she has followed ranching since the death of her husband many years ago and scored great success. Mrs. Burks not only followed the trail, but she is a member of the Old-Time Trail Drivers' Association, and attends the reunions thereof at San Antonio. She has been crowned Queen of the Trail, and bears the title with becoming grace.

Henry does not belong to this society. We don't need his kind.

There are thousands living that drove the Chisholm Trail—men who can verify my statements made above. From the numbers of these men and their descendants have been produced nationally recognized financiers and capitalists, as well as artists, musicians and writers. Some of the finest poetry produced in America has found its inspiration at the camp-fire—poetry of the virile kind that is so typified in the verse of Walt Whitman.

THIS Parisian critic who refers to the pioneer cattlemen and women as "wizened, weary, gaunt and homely, living sordid lives," is very evidently one of those modern sophists reared in a hot-house environment and wholly incapable of the deeper and finer emotions that are the birthright of the people of the open—God's own. He can see nothing colorful or beautiful in the life of the true-hearted little women who followed their husbands along paths that led into God's Great Unknown Lands—often the daughters of proud old Virginian ancestors; women who might have graced the ballroom of the White House of that day. Because these women did not drink bootleg whisky, rouge their lips to invite the kisses of the libertine, indulge in cigarettes and promiscuous cursing—because these women bore children, and nursed them instead of poodle dogs and monkeys—they must necessarily appear hideous to this critic.

There was the bloom of health in the pioneer's cheek under a coat of tan; there was the light of determination and purpose in his eye; there was the buoyancy of the trained athlete in his step—he may not have possessed the beauty of the fabled Apollo, nor a vocabulary of a critic—but, my ——! he was a man!

AS FOR this man's abuse of the work of Emerson Hough, it is ludicrous—maudlin.

Four thousand five hundred cattle were not driven in one herd in 1867. Hickok was not marshal at Abilene in 1867. There were from five thousand to six thousand cattle driven in one herd later. Hickok was marshal at Abilene, also, at a later date.

The manner in which Hough wove his story made it so plain a present-day schoolboy could not fail to understand it as to its facts, much less an old trailer or Texas pioneer. Hough lived in the West and Southwest, mixed and mingled with the old pioneers, and gathered first-hand information.

He had before him "The Trail Drivers of Texas" containing many hundred sketches from the pens of old trail drivers to guide him in his writing of the story. Henry lived a few years at Abilene when a small boy.

Hough's story is praised and Henry's criticism condemned by all old pioneers. Henry did just what he accused Hough of doing—misleading and fooling the Eastern public. He surely did not expect to reach the attention of old trail drivers when he said: "Almost no one now lives who saw the Chisholm Trail or that early village of Abilene, Kansas, once the famous cattle emporium. And very few of those roving inhabitants of half a century ago could write down what they experienced or knew."

A small portion of Henry's criticism borders on facts—while most of it is so erroneous that the effect of the whole is spoiled.—GEO. W. SAUNDERS.

FOLLOWING is part of a letter from Mr. Saunders to *Adventure*, adding somewhat to the above:

San Antonio, Texas.

I was born in Gonzales County, Texas, 60 miles from San Antonio, in 1854. Raised on a cattle ranch.

Helped gather and start the first herds to Kansas from Goliad, Bee and Refugio Counties in 1867 and continued in this work until 1871 when I went with a herd from Wilson County to Abilene, Kansas. I went different trails to northern markets nine years from 1871 to 1885 and have been personally acquainted with 90% of all the stockmen and trail drivers of Texas—met them on the trails, at northern markets and cattle-raisers' conventions. Have been in the live stock commission business at San Antonio since 1886; have a branch house at Ft. Worth. I have been in close touch with the cattle industry all these years. In 1874 after having gone up the trail and seeing the industry redeeming our State, I conceived the idea of organizing an old trail drivers association. I agitated this organization and gathered data continuously until 1915 when the organization was born.

In 1920 I published Volume I of "The Trail Drivers of Texas" and Volume 2 in 1923. Those sketches were gathered from the men that developed Texas and helped develop the Northwest and, aside from some mirthfulness, they are facts. I know the men and they know me and I can vouch for them all being authentic. I cut out all the tragedies, as my object was to have the good and not the bad acts coupled with this great industry. A large majority of the men interested in this great empire building were all wool and a yard wide, while the critics picture them all gunmen, illiterate, scrubs.

EMERSON HOUGH was a gentleman and I think one of the best fiction writers of his day. His story, "North of 36," was read and enjoyed and endorsed by old pioneers and trail drivers. Also read and enjoyed by people who did not know anything about the Wild West. I do not think any other writer has ever come nearer describing ranch and trail life than Hough did. No men that had the actual experience could do it, as they did not have the tact to do so. Hough was interested in a ranch ten miles from San Antonio quite a while; his old partner, Judge C. A. Goeth, still owns the ranch and is a prominent attorney of San Antonio. Hough mixed and mingled with the ranch and trail people, gathered first-hand information, had the sketches in Volume 1 to guide him. His story was partly built from this book.

I know Hough's fiction story is trustworthy; I know Stuart Henry's statements were not. I am speaking for all the members of the Old Trail Drivers Association, 1400, all men, no jelly beans. We are all up in arms against such as Stuart Henry.—G. W. SAUNDERS.

C. F. McCarty, who went to Dodge City in 1876 and passed thirty-five years in the West and Southwest:

Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Hello, the Camp-Fire! I am not so much of an old-timer as some of the other members, but want to kick in on this Hough-Henry muss.

I went to Dodge City in '76 and stayed in the West and Southwest until 1911. Activities confined mostly to following States and territories: Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, I. T., Oklahoma and Texas. As to my work with cattle. I have closeherded, riddenline, followed the roundup in fall and spring and driven on the trail.

NOW for your questions. Did Emerson Hough know the West of which he wrote? I'll answer "yes." Did he portray it faithfully in his books? Yes. Does Mr. Henry in his criticisms evidence a superior knowledge? No.

Now, as to your other questions. Don't think I am competent to judge Mr. Pendexter, although I never miss any of his stories. Just a word about Mr. Frederick Bechdolt. In his articles of the West, he tells it just as it happened. I know; I was around there. Before Mr. Hough, as Mr. Douglas Molloch so aptly put it, "rode on ahead of us," I had the pleasure of receiving a letter from him once in a while. I have one of his letters here before me now dated a short time before his death.

In reference to his story "North of 36" and *in re* something that had gone before, he wrote (I will quote his exact words). "Of course, you know it is fiction only founded on fact." There it is in a nutshell. Isn't it a fact that about the time Mr. Hough wrote of, there were thousands of cattle in Texas for which there was no home market, and isn't it a fact that some one conceived the idea of driving them north to market and did drive the first herd, and isn't it a fact that the man or men who drove this first herd to market wrought a great change in the cattle industry and everybody remotely connected with it? Then why quibble about a Fourth of July celebration or a bridge or whether there were women in a certain town on a certain date? I'll say this: If there weren't any women there, it must have been a brand new town indeed. And as for joining in a celebration, ——! after a fellow has been on the trail two or three months he will join any old celebration. And if he don't find one to join, he will put on one of his own.

ABOUT the time Mr. Henry was acquiring his A. B. I was riding the hot, dusty trail with a bullet cut from a cartridge, or a pebble, in my mouth, to produce a little moisture or swimming some swollen river, pulling them out of the quicksand, or maybe riding around them at night, telling them about "Sam Bass," "Old Trego," "John Anderson," "Frog Mouth Ann," what a time I had in "Arkansaw" or to "Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie." And glancing now and then at the "Big Dipper," to see if it was time to wake up the relief guard. Yes, you can get acquainted with the stars if you get out under them every night. Ask Bill Adams.

The only college I attended was the college of experience. The yell for that college is "Silence." But there are times when a fellow can't keep silent. This is one of them. All the cattle driven up the trail were not shipped by rail from Kansas. Almost from the inception of the northern drive, part of them were diverted to stocking the ranges in the Middle West and Northwest.

Abeline may have been called a "Steer Metropolis," and steer, not cow, may have been the generic term used in speaking of cattle in '67, but it was not the term used a few years later. It was "cow town," "cowboy" or puncher, good "cow-house," "cow-country," "cow-camp." If a bunch of cattle was composed entirely of steers, ready for driving up the trail, a person might refer to them as steers, but he would be more apt to refer to them as "the beef herd." But that steer business is beside the point. It is a bum steer.

MR. HENRY says few of those roving inhabitants of half a century ago could write down what they experienced or knew. Granted. But here is one of those roving inhabitants, of almost half a century ago (and still roving) who thinks Mr. Hough wrote a very good description of a trip up the trail. I've seen some eastern greenhorns flabbergasted and some that weren't so easy to flabbergast. And as to the "amazing tales"—the half has never been told. Mr. Henry seems to think the wiry frontiersmen of the cattle camp and prairie schooner were too gaunt, homely, hungry, weary, forlorn and weary-eyed for romance. Some of these terms might apply to some of them at times. But they didn't bar Old Lady

Romance. She and Old Man Adventure have danced hand in hand by the light of every fire that ever was kindled on the loneliest trails that ever were traveled. They have beckoned to us from the top of every hill and the crest of every wave and are still beckoning to some of us.

I guess that roving inhabitant applies to me. I started this letter at Ft. Myers, Fla., as soon as I got the copy of *Adventure* containing Mr. Henry's criticism. Added a little to it at St. Petersburg, Fla., still more in Tampa, Fla., and am now going to write finish here in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Here is hoping some of the old timers will speak up. I sure would like to hear from them.—C. F. McCarty.

P. S.—They used to call me "Pease River" down in Texas in the long ago, and I had a buddy that was called "Red River."

JUST why Chief Magistrate McAdoo of New York City was impolitic enough to hurt his own case by issuing any such challenge I don't know, unless it was that he was not familiar with U. S. conditions outside New York City and really believed no one but a crook could get service out of a gun. Since he seems to like challenges, I challenge him to tell the readers of *Adventure* just how intimate is his knowledge of conditions outside New York City and other large cities, to state just how much of the U. S. he has seen for himself, and how much time he has spent in the seeing. He might also state whether he was born in this country and, if not, when he came here and when he was naturalized. He may be able to make very satisfactory replies to all these questions, for I know as little about him as he and Senator Copeland seem to know about guns, crime suppression and personal rights guaranteed citizens by the Constitution, but I'm willing to take a chance.

Meanwhile here's an answer to his challenge from one of our "A.A." men and a member of our writers' brigade:

Los Angeles, California.

Re the anti-pistol law fathered by Chief Magistrate McAdoo of New York City and Senator Copeland. McAdoo in a letter published in *Outdoor Life*, has challenged any man to tell of a case where a man packing a gun capable of concealment has gained thereby or beaten a hold-up man or burglar, claiming being armed is a handicap. I answered him.

Now let me add, through *Adventure*, a little more publicity to the reply.

LAST week, in this city, Los Angeles, a man named Werdin, whom I have known initmately for many years, killed the man who held him and some friends up and robbed them. In Minneapolis, in '83, they had an epidemic of hold-ups and Mr. Wolff, a merchant, said the people should carry revolvers and use them. The night after the publication of his opinion, two men held him up and one sneered at him, regarding his published advice. Wolff lived up to his name, drew and shot.

Within a week, two more citizens shot bandits. The hold-up game played out in Minneapolis abruptly.

Mr. Fishback was riding with his sweetheart in Rochester, Minn. A bandit jumped out, caught the horse and aimed a gun, demanding cash.

"Duck low, honey!" cried Fishback to his girl and grabbed his own gun. The bandit fired, missed and caught a chunk of lead in his body.

A man undertook to annihilate the writer, in '89, with a pitchfork. A little swift display of a revolver saved me a multiple puncture.

A young tough came at me with an ax, swearing he would split me to my breastbone. Looking into the muzzle of a gun took all the war out of him. An older tough, who had killed three men and escaped any punishment through being wealthy and hiring skilled attorneys, told others that he would shoot my heart clear out of my body. My skill with a revolver, demonstrated by three shots at a target, saved me.

I HAVE never fired a shot at any human being in my life, yet I have quelled the fighting spirit in quite a few men who were out to kill, as I did with this killer, by showing readiness and considerable skill. Just as my friend, Ed Payne, of Virginia, once cowed eight men, Blackhand killers, who were after his life, by killing two fighting hawks with three shots from his pair of S. & W. guns.

Ed saved his own life once, when confronted by a band of killers, by shooting the upper teeth out of the leader's mouth, then knocking him cold with the gun and awing the rest with a second gun.

MAGISTRATE McADOO is ignorant of the subject he pretends to be expert in. He sits in court and judges the scum of New York City. Outside of what he sees there, his ignorance is abysmal.

Old Man Wiggins converted a shotgun into a short weapon, capable of easy concealment, in just nine minutes by the watch.

McAdoo imagines his contemptible bill, taxing revolvers and pistols at fifty dollars each and loaded shells at one dollar each, would stop all killings. He might as well claim he can eradicate a sun-spot by spitting on it. The bill is ridiculous and so is any man who conceives such a thing.

My pet gun uses a Winchester rifle cartridge. Will he eliminate sporting rifles also?

I HAVE personal knowledge of cases where pocket revolvers have saved between thirty and forty people from holdups. Of more than a score of cases where burglars have been routed, killed or captured by the use of such guns. Of several cases where such guns have stopped mobs. Of others where such guns have prevented murder.

Magistrate McAdoo, until the Sullivan Law shows results worth mentioning, in the suppression of crime, just keep still about a national Sullivan Law.—E. E. Harriman.

OWING to an error in making up the magazine the story by Barry Scobee which we hoped to include in this issue had to be taken out at the last minute. Since all of our color work is printed before the body of the book goes to press it was too late for us to take Mr. Scobee's name off the cover, where it now appears. Our apologies to you and to Mr. Scobee, whose story will, of course, appear in a later issue.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow. Anyone may apply for a Camp-Fire Station.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

Arizona—200—Clifton. C. Hooker.
209—Quartzite. Buck Conner, Box 4.

Arkansas—161—Hot Springs. Tom Manning, Jr., 322 Morrison Ave.

California—28—Lost Hills. Mr. and Mrs. M. A. Monson, Cottage Inn.
60—San Bernardino. Charles A. Rouse, Hotel St. Augustine.
73—Galt. E. M. Cook, Box 256.
74—Eagle Rock. John R. Finney, 109 Eddy Ave.
89—Chico. K. W. Mason, 1428 Park Ave.
108—Helendale. G. R. Wells, P. O. Box 17.
113—Vallejo. Edith G. Engesser, Golden Triangle Rabbitry, Highway Homes.
115—Los Gatos. G. H. Johnson.
116—Sebastopol. Mrs. Lucy E. Hicks, 420 S. Main St.
126—Covelo. Whit H. Ham. Box 388.
141—Santa Cruz. A. W. Wyatt, Capitola Road and Jose Ave.
149—San Francisoo. A. H. Hutchinson, Veteran Press, 1264 Valencia St.
186—Santa Ysabel. William Strever, Santa Ysabel Inn.
210—Berkeley. Dr. Louis C. Mullikin, 305 Acheson Bldg.
211—Pomona. Fred G. Sunley, 480 E. Alverado St.
212—Del Monte. Alex H. Sokoloff, 3rd Signal Co. R. O. T. C.
231—San Francisco. Earl V. Swift, 24-A Brady St.
251—Williams. Joe Lanouette, Opera Pool Hall.
252—Fresno. Mrs. Harriet Church, Echo Gardens, 712 Echo Ave.
257—San Francisco. K. F. Richards, 1807 Post St.

Colorado—105—Grand Junction. Bart Lynch, 236 Main St.

Connecticut—103—New Haven. Ralph Pierson, 3 Yale Station.
142—Meriden. Homer H. Brown, 1 Colony Place.

Delaware—232—Delmar. J. A. Aniba, Stone House Hotel.

D. C.—167—Washington. Walter A. Sheil, 503 Sixth St, N. E.

Florida—87—Miami. A. C. Smith, 49 N. E. First St.
117—Miami. Miami Canoe Club, 115 S. W. South River Drive.
128—Titusville. Max von Koppelow, Box 1014.
139—St. Petersburg. Capt. Lee Whetstone, Hotel Poinsettia.
143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
158—Crescent City. E. N. Clark, care *Call*.
188—Johnson. Clifford Martin.
258—Jacksonville. T. J. Eppes, The Hobby Shop.

Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald*.

Idaho—110—Pocatello. C. W. Craig, 223 S. Second Ave.

Illinois—66—Mt. Carmel. W. C. Carter, 1122 Chestnut St.
67—Plainfield. J. P. Glass, The Linshield Co.
189—Chicago. Herman A. Schell, 8708 Vincennes Ave.
213—Chicago. Pietro Ferraro, 1007 S. Peoria St.
237—Chicago. Wm. Churchill, 6541 S. State St.
253—Chicago. G. C. Huebner, 1015 Oakdale Ave.

Indiana—18—Connersville. Norba Wm. Guerin, 112 East Eighteenth St.
90—Linton. Herschell Isom, 73 Tenth St., N. E.
180—Warsaw. Homer Lewis.

Iowa—238—Atlantic. George Woodbury, 5 E Third St.

Kansas—228—Leavenworth. Ben H. Lukenbill, 315 Shawnee St.

Kentucky—144—Corbin. Keith Mauney.
190—Louisville. H. S. Summers, 421 W. Jefferson St.

Louisiana—191—Melville. Wm. P. Stephens.
202—New Orleans. W. Bailey, 1116 Iberville St., Cor. Basin.
228—St. Rose. C. M. Elfer.

Maine—19—Bangor. Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St.
59—Augusta. Robie M. Liscomb, 73½ Bridge St.
111—Lewiston. Howard N. Lary, 714 Main Street.
243—Winthrop. O. A. Abbot.

Maryland—55—Baltimore. Henry W. L. Fricke, 1200 E. Madison St., at Asquith.
82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
151—Williamsport. L. J. Schaefer. Frederick St.

Michigan—69—Grand Rapids. Dr. A. B. Muir, 1121 Turner Ave., N. W.
79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News*, 109½ N. Washington Ave.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.
131—North Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsyth Publisher's Service, Phone 5891.
137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
227—Adrian. S. N. Cook, 221 Clinton St.

Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
145—Brainerd. F. T. Tracey, care Brainerd Gas & Electric Co.

Mississippi—88—Tunica. C. S. Swann, Tunica Plumbing & Electric Shop.
99—Picayune. D. E. Jonson.

Missouri—51—St. Louis. W. R. Hoyt, 7921 Van Buren St., phone Riverside 250.
94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
127—Salem. Emmet C. Higgins, 100 N. Tenth St.

Montana—240—Fort Missoula, Company C, 4th Infantry.
254—Hamilton. Mrs. Lucy Hyde, 64 N. Second St.

Nebraska—95—Omaha. L. W. Stewart, 119 No. 16th St.
214—Tecumseh. Dr. C. F. Roh.

New Mexico—96—Silver City. Edward S. Jackson, Box 435.
203—Elephant Butte via Engle. Henry Stein.
220—Santa Fe. N. Howard Thorp, 103 Palace Ave.

New Jersey—164—Chatham. Roy S. Tinney.
91—Tenafly. Ed Stiles, P. O. Box 254.
146—Paterson. Charles S. Gall, 378 Dakota St.
244—East Orange. Alfred C. Swenson, 77 Lawton St.
245—Corbin City. Lee Roberts.
260—Camden. Benj. P. Thomas, 2791 Constitution Rd.

New York—23—Jamestown. W. E. Jones, 906 Jefferson St.
34—New York City. St. Mary's Men's Club, 142 Alexander Ave., Bronx, N. Y. C.

107—New York City. Bronx Division, U. S. Junior Naval Reserves, 3132 Webster Ave.
147—Youngsville. Harry Malowitz, Youngsville House.
165—Saratoga. Wm. Marshall, Office No. 9, Chamber of Commerce Arcade.
177—Brooklyn. George Iverson, 306 Macon St.
185—Brooklyn. J. M. Canavan, 69 Bond St.
193—Niagara Falls. Roy Tompkins, 1155 Garret Ave.
194—Hadley. Mrs Chas. H. Black.
205—Newburgh. Jacques Teller, 5 Golden St.
215—George's Sport Shop, 45 Main St., Yonkers.
226—Red Hook. P. W. E. Hart, The Silver Birch Shop, Albany Post Road, Dutchess Co.
233—Albany. R. N. Bradley, 84 Livingston Ave.
239—Brooklyn. Arthur Borchmann, 451 Rodney St.

North Carolina—133—Pine Bluff. N. Steve Hutchings.
159—Waynesville. Harry M. Hall, 720 Walnut St.
92—Biltmore. C. Marshall Gravatt, Felstone Co.
255—Tryon. Howard Shannon.

North Dakota—206—Fairmount. Frank Kitchener, Richland Hotel.

Ohio—58—Cleveland. J. F. Thompson, Community Pharmacy, 9505 Denison Ave.
52—Ulrichsville. Anthony Sciarra, 329 W. Fourth St.
63—Ulrichsville. Chas. F. Burroway, 312 Water St.
75—Columbus. Chas. W. Jenkins, 54 S. Burgess Ave.
113—Buena Vista. Geo. T. Watters.
166—Toledo. Frank P. Carey, 3267 Maplewood Ave., or wherever his Ford happens to be.
207—Columbus. Tod S. Raper, 77 Taylor Ave.
241—Cincinnati. D. W. Davidson, 1414 Vine St.
242—Bellefontaine. Harry E. Edselle, 328 Plumvalley St.

Oklahoma—57—Haskell. Roy Holt.
225—Shawnee. A. M. Postlethwaite, 521 N. Beard St.
234—Blackwell. H. W. Willis, 204½ N. Main St.
Oregon—4—Salem. D. Wiggins.

Pennsylvania—20—Philadelphia. Wm. A. Fulmer, 252 S. Ninth St.
21—Braddock. Clarence Jenkins, Union News Co.
24—Philadelphia. Alfred A. Krombach. 4159 N. Eighth Street, and Spring Mills Station, P. & R. Ry. Co., Montgomery County.
78—Pittsburgh. Peter C. Szarmach, 350 Harmer St.
100—Philadelphia. Veterans of Foreign Wars, 926 N. 41st St.
182—Greensburg. Don Frederick Wermuth.
224—Oil City. J. M. Blair, 608 W. Front St.
247—Pittsburgh. J. F. Lichtenhaler, 224 Swope St.
248—Philadelphia. Carl D. Charles, 214 East St., Wissahickon.

South Dakota—179—Fairburn. Jesse K. Fell, *Custer County Press.*

South Carolina—217—Charleston. J. H. Keener, 346 King St.
97—Charleston. J. W. Mette, Navy Yard.

Tennessee—195—Knoxville. C. G. Pruden, 2024 Rose Ave.
Texas—33—Houston. J. M. Shamblin, 4805 Oakland St.
123—San Juan. D. L. Carter, Box 436.
134—Breckenridge. Joe Randel, 226 Baylor Avenue.
148—Port Arthur. Ralph C. Cornwell, 215 Eighth St.
174—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West Eighth St.
183—South San Antonio. J. F. Nicodemus, Box 111, So. San Antonio Transfer.
218—Fort Worth. Robert Lentz, R No. 6 Box 73.
208—San Angelo. E. M. Weeks, 24 West 8th St.
256—Dallas. L. H. Baker, 3205 Dallas St.
Utah—157—Salt Lake City. Ned Howard, 127 N. St.

Vermont—56—Fort Ethan Allen. E. Worth Benson, Box 10.
Virginia—108—Cape Charles. Lynn Stevenson, Custom House Building.
219—Richmond. Wm. Meek, 104 S. 1st St.
Washington—1—Ione. A. S. Albert, Albert's Billiard Hall.
61—Burlington. Judge B. N. Albertson, Fairhaven Ave.
83—Seattle. Chas. D. Raymer, Raymer's Old Book-Store, 1330 First Ave.
154—Mt. Vernon. Miss Beatrice Bell, Western Washington Auto Club.
155—Olympia. B. F. Hume, Commercial Club Rooms.
172—Sunnyside. Mark Austin.
196—Arlington. F. T. Herzinger.
220—Sultan. George W. Snyder, Main St., opp. Post Office.
West Virginia—48—Huntington. John Geiske, 1682 Sixth St.
Wisconsin—41—Madison. Frank Weston, 401 Gay Bldg.
5—Milwaukee. Paul A. Buerger, Apt. V, 1305 Cedar St.
138—Tomahawk Lake. Mrs. J. S. Hughson, Hughson's Resort.

Australia—39—Melbourne. William H. Turner, "Wolwoling" Keen St. Northcote; and Carters' and Drivers' Union, 46 William St.
76—Victoria. Chas. M. Healy, 30, The Avenue, Windsor Post, Dist. No. 8.
130—Brisbane. H. V. Shead, Sutton St., Kangaroo Pt.
235—Sydney. Phillip Norman, 842 Military Road, Nosman, Newtown.

Belgium—131—Antwerp. Reuben S. James, Place de l'Entrepot 3.

Bermuda—230—St. George's. Fred C. Taylor, Wainright Cottage.

British Columbia—231—Stewart. Jack O'Shea, Ryan Bldg.
236—Vancouver. A. Johnson, 552-3 Hastings St.

Canada—31—Howe Sound, B. C. C. Plowden, Plowden Bay.
84—White Rock, B. C. Charles L. Thompson.
22—Burlington, Ontario. T. M. Waumsly, Jocelyn Bookstore.
4—Dunedin, P. E. Island. J. N. Berrigan.
29—Deseronto, Ontario. Harry M. Moore, *The Post Weekly.*
45—Norwood, Manitoba. Albert Whyte, 84 La Riviere St.
30—Winnipeg, Man. Walter Peterson, 143 Kennedy St.
62—Woodstock, Ontario. George L. Catton, 94 Metcalfe St.
85—Oshawa, Ontario. J. Worral, 6½ King St. E.
102—Amherst, Nova Scotia. Lloyd E. MacPherson, 5 Belmont St.
124—Hartshorn, Alberta. Leonard Brown, 33-34-17 W4M.
178—Moncton. N. B. Chas. H. McCall, 178 St. George St.
221—Montreal East. M. M. Campbell, 95 Broadway.
249—Richmond, Ontario. Ernest Armstrong, R.D. 2.
250—Sault Ste. Marie. James McDonald, 504 Queen St. E.

Canal Zone—37—Cristobal. F. E. Stevens.
156—Ancon. Arthur Haughton, Box 418.

China—222—Tientsin. Dr. George W. Twomey, 43 Rue de France.

Cuba—15—Havana. Ricardo N. Farres, Dominques, 7 Cerro.
175—Miranda, Oriente. Volney L. Held.

Egypt—173—Khartoum, Sudany. W. T. Moffat, Sudan Customs.

Hawaiian Islands—170—Leilehua, Oahu, Château Shanty.

Honduras, C. A.—32—Galeras, Olancho. Dr. Wm. C. Robertson.
70—La Ceiba. Jos Buckly Taylor.

India—197—Calcutta. W. Leishman, 46 Wellesley St.

Mexico—68—Guadalajara, Jal. W. C. Money, Hotel Fenix, Calle Lopez, Cotilla Nos. 269 a 281.
223—Mazatlan, Sin. Paul L. Horn, Hotel de France, Apartado 102.

Navy—71—U. S. *Arizona.* Elmer E. McLean.
140—U. S. *Shawmut.* J. D. Montgomery.

Newfoundland—132—St. John's. P. C. Mars, Smallwood Bldg.

Porto Rico—46—Ensenada. M. B. Couch, P. O. Box 5.
Philippine Islands—198—Manila. W. W. Weston, De La Rama Bldg.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., runs in the last issue of each month.

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey
27. Asia Minor
28—30. Balkans. In Three Parts
31. Scandinavia
32. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
33. Great Britian
34—36. South America. In Three Parts
37. Central America
38—39. Mexico. In Two Parts
40—46. Canada. In Seven Parts
47. Alaska
48. Baffinland and Greenland
49—54. Western U. S. In Six Parts
55—58. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
59—64. Eastern U. S. In Six Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
Forestry in the United States
Tropical Forestry
Aviation
Army Matters, United States and Foreign
American Anthropology North of Panama Canal
First Aids on the Trail
Health-Building Outdoors
Standing Information

New Guinea and Its Mountains

A WONDERFUL land for explorer, scientist and prospector:

Question:—"It is my intention to visit New Guinea and strike off into the interior and explore the mountains with a camera, with a couple of natives if possible and lecture on the country when I come out. I shall excuse myself as being a prospector, having done a little prospecting before.

I am a surveyor by calling and have spent several years in the Canadian backwoods and can fill any position in a survey party, land-surveying, timber-estimating, mapping, etc. Can handle myself with the mitts. Will have one thousand dollars with which to pay expenses, but would like to come out with as much money as I went in with if possible. Am twenty-five years of age and healthy.

Would it be possible to find employment or connect up with some exploration party? What is the best time of the year to arrive in New Guinea? What district is most desirable for my purpose, and what is the best route in?

Is it possible to "live off the country," as we can do here, by fishing and hunting? What firearms should I have? About what is the temperature of the higher altitudes, and what clothing is necessary?

What is the cost of porters? Should presents be taken along, and what should they be?

How much territory do the mountains cover, and what are their altitudes? How much of them have been explored? What are the country's minerals, and what are the opportunities for the prospector?

What Government literature is available, and from whom obtainable?. What steamship lines make calls at Port Moresby?

Please excuse the number of questions; but owing to the length of time required to communicate with New Guinea, I thought it advisable to put all my questions into one communication rather than several consecutive letters. I am enclosing an order for thirty cents to cover postage and registration of reply. Please withhold my name from print."—M. R. B., Montreal, P. Q., Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Armit:—Very interested in your plan to tour through the interior of New Guinea with two natives and a camera, but I am sorry to dampen your optimistic ideas of this wild and difficult land. The scheme deserves success, but unfortunately it is quite impracticable. Do not be annoyed at my brutal frankness; I think it best to speak plainly and thus save you any unnecessary worry and disappointment should you decide to take on the trip.

New Guinea is a very mountainous country, roadless except for a few miles around the few scattered towns and hamlets on the coast, and travel is consequently very expensive. No pack animals or vehicles can be used for transport work, all this sort of work being done by native porters who back-pack every item of food, etc., into the tall country inland. Lone-hand travel is impossible anywhere off the coast. And to travel the coast one would need a boat or canoe—which means the hiring of a crew to handle it among the coral reefs. So if you come to this interesting island be prepared to find it rough and difficult to ramble around in.

YOU will find the books listed herein full of meat about New Guinea:

"Papua or British New Guinea," by J. H. P. Murray, published by T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., London, England. 1912.

"Patrolling in Papua," by W. R. Humphries, same publishers. 1923.

"Unexplored New Guinea," by W. R. Beaver, published by Seeley Service & Co., Ltd., London, England. 1915.

"The Isle of Vanishing Men," by W. F. Alder, published by Leonard Parsons, Ltd., London, England. 1922.

"A Naturalist in Cannibal Land," by A. S. Meek, published by T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd., London, England. 1913.

"Patrolling in Papua" will give you the proper perspective of travel in the uplands of this terrible island. Humphries did not overstate the case one little bit. Get hold of his book and read it.

Your one thousand dollars would not give you much more than a couple of months' jaunt through New Guinea, for you would have to engage a team of carriers, and possibly a white man to guide you through the peaks. But I forgot; you are a surveyor, so the latter expense would be unnecessary; but your expenditure would be steep all the same.

No hope in life of making money here unless you take up some form of business or practise your profession. And local demand for surveyors is much less than the available supply of men well experienced in the vagaries of New Guinea.

No hope of joining up with an exploration party. Best time to arrive in the island is after the passing of the northwest monsoon—May onward to November.

THE whole of the interior is a very good field for exploration and general scientific research. Go in from any part of the coast.

The route is much the same; a few miles through the foot-hills, then a climb over the coastal range, up hillsides like a greasy wall, and you have arrived—at the beginning of the main range. Mountains from then on until you get weary of viewing the world standing on end.

No white man can live off the country in New Guinea. All the grub you will wrap yourself around on the trip must be packed in with you; a small quantity of game—wallaby, pig, pigeons, cassowary—can be shot in the lowlands, but once in the highlands you depend on your chop-box for food.

Firearms can be brought into the island without restriction, but the owners must be of white (Caucasian) ancestry; Aisatics and other colored folk are not allowed to own arms without first obtaining a special permit from the police. The usual arms toted about the island are mostly Winchester .44 repeaters or the same firm's automatic rifles, Savage .250-3000, B. S. A. .303, and the usual Colt .38 or .45 revolvers or the same maker's automatic pistol.

Temperature of the higher altitudes is not low, as the usual clothing worn in the lowlands can be used there if it is supplemented with decent blankets and a few woolen shirts or a sweater. No snow or ice in Papua, but over in the Dutch section, in the Snow Mountains, there are some hefty glaciers to cool one down after the steam and boil of the plains.

Porters cost about 6d (12 cents) a day plus food. Practically the whole island is covered with mountains. The highest (in Dutch New Guinea) is over 22,900 feet above the sea, but there are hundreds of peaks well over the 10,000-feet level. Most of Dutch and the former German (now known as Territory of New Guinea and administered by Australia under a mandate from the League of Nations) New Guinea is unexplored except along the main rivers; the northwestern end of Papua (the Territory of Papua) is unknown, but the greater part of the colony has been mapped.

Minerals, metals—New Guinea holds most of the known metals and minerals. Gold and copper have been worked profitably. The whole of the island is a field for the man with sufficient money and energy to delve into the creeks and watercourses in search of fortune. A good deal of attention is now being given to the mandatory Territory of New Guinea for gold and osmiridium.

General—The day of presents to the heathen has passed. Brown Brother is a business man even if he lives in the wilderness, and he expects to be paid for his labor or goods. Mostly he accepts what are known as "trade goods," which cover all sorts of ironmongery, tobacco, calicoes, etc.

Steamer runs monthly from Sydney, New South Wales, to Port Moresby and Rabaul, the capital of New Britain, an island of the Territory of New Guinea. One point I must impress upon you: Do not consider coming to New Guinea unless you have a roll large enough to keep you going for several months after you get there. New Guinea is a —— of a place to be stranded in. It costs $50 a month to board at a hotel in Moresby without providing coin for clothes, laundry, smokes, etc. Trust this will help you.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

Wants to Be a Lumber-Grader

HARD work and a hard head will get a man anywhere, just as Mr. Liebe says:

Question:—"I want to know if there are any places you know of where they teach lumber-grading and inspection; if so, where are they and when are they in session and what would it cost to get into one of them, or if there is no such school how would you go about learning to be an inspector. Enclosed you will find postage and a self-addressed envelop for reply."—W. D. BAILEY, Phill Campbell, Ala.

Answer, by Mr. Liebe:—I have never heard of any school except the hard old school of hard knocks and experience for the teaching of lumber-grading, inspection, etc., and if there were such schools as you inquire about they wouldn't be worth much.

If I were you, and meant to be a grader or inspector of lumber, I would go about it this way:

First, decide whether you want to be a hardwood man or a softwood man. Go after a mill inspector's job first—green lumber, you know. Get a job as close to the mill inspector as possible, and make friends with him, and while this is going on polish up your arithmetic and practise penmanship and spelling at night and on Sundays (you will need all this later). Get the mill inspector to show you things about lumber grades, and take his place at odd times when he wants to go off for a smoke or to rest for a few minutes. After you have learned grading in a fair way, get a job as mill inspector somewhere else, preferably where you are not known, and hold it down if it breaks a hamstring. After you have green lumber down "pat," it is but a step to yard work and real wages.

Some mills require their edgerman and trimmerman to know something of grades. Either of these places is a fair stepping-stone to mill inspection; but unless the mill is equipped with transfer chains all around either job is very hard work.

I believe this is about all that I can tell you that would help. A very great deal, you know, will depend upon your own will to learn. Don't forget that a man can do anything on earth if only he wants to hard enough. You are likely to find lots of little trouble in learning to be an inspector or grader, but nobody can hold you back if you really want to go forward. It is a pretty good job, and I wish you lots of good luck.

Books on the Straits Settlements

A bibliography that is short because it must be:

Question:—"Can you recommend two or three good books on each of the following countries in your department of 'Ask Adventure' service—Andamans, Malay Straits, and the Straits Settlements?

Would like to have books covering the life and customs of the natives and the plant and animal life. Wish to avoid, if it is possible, books dwelling on politics, social activities, commercial data and those written in the usual travel style.

Can secure books published in England if you care to list them."—R. C. WRIGHT, New Orleans, La.

Answer, by Mr. MacCreagh:—I'm afraid I can't recommend you any American publications on the Andamans and Malay Straits. I don't know of any myself, and there don't seem to be any listed.

If however, as you say, you can get hold of English books, I'm sure you will find the following very illuminative.

I mark first choices with a star.

*"British Malaya," by Sir Frank Swettenham (covers both Str. Sets. and Fed. States).

"Straits Settlements Blue Book," 1912.

*"Further India," by H. Clifford.

As I look over my notes I find that most of the books I know are published in Singapore—and they aren't books anyway. They're reports of various Government departments, like "Journal of the Malay Archipelago," Logan, Singapore; "Journal of the Straits Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society."

This last you may be able to get in London. If you can, you will find it full of good dope.

Andamans are a more difficult question. I just don't know of any books on the Andamans except the "Record of the Andamanese" in eleven volumes, published by the India Office, London.

And I find that there is some mention of these islands in Vol. IV of the Proceedings of the National Museum, U. S. A. But I don't know anything about this personally.

Albuquerque

A CITY of New Mexico which bears the honored name of two distinguished Portuguese commanders and of an ancient town in Spain:

Question:—"We are a young married couple with no children. My wife is a first-class waitress and school-teacher; that is of low-grade schools.

I am a first-class barber and am also a musician; play clarinet or violin, either band or orchestra.

We would like to go to New Mexico, preferably Albuquerque, the latter part of next Summer. We will go in a Ford car and camp on the way, as we love camping and it would be cheaper. We will have enough money to go out with and probably fifty dollars besides.

We understand Albuquerque to be a Winter resort; therefore there should be work for a waitress and a barber, shouldn't there? Can you tell me how I could get in touch with some hotel or barbershops next Summer? We would like to get a start so we could settle there. Please tell me what sort of business is carried on there. Will you please answer the following questions:

What are our chances?

I have heard that the barber-shops in New Mexico were owned or worked by Mexicans and therefore would not hold desirable jobs for Americans. Is this true?

About how many barber-shops are there in Albuquerque?

About what percentage of the population of that city is Mexican?

Do you ever have snow or freezing weather there?

How far must one go from Albuquerque to see desert and cactus?

I have heard that fancy riding-boots and sombreros are not seen around there nowadays. Is that so?

On our trips we plan to sleep in a tent. Is there any danger from snakes or other reptiles?

Is the old trail from Missouri to Santa Fé a good auto road?"—H. C.

P. S. If this is published please do not use my name and address.

Answer, by Mr. Robinson:—Albuquerque is not really a Winter resort; it is an all-the-year-round health resort. We have a city of about thirty thousand, well paved and lighted. The largest railroad shops on the Santa Fé system, employing two thousand men now. Big sawmill, sash and door factory, etc. Payroll of city is about one million dollars a month.

The city is much like any other city of its size in the United States. The people are engaged in similar businesses and wear the same kind of clothes as they would back East. If you were set down in the city without knowing where it was located, from what you could see you would know no difference and could not tell the part of the country you were in unless by the sunny days and largely cloudless skies.

There are some so-called Mexicans here, perhaps thirty-five per cent. of the population; but they are no more noticeable than the foreign-blooded population in the Eastern cities. Besides, most of them are American citizens, born and raised here, and their fathers before them for four hundred years, for New Mexico was settled by the Spaniards in 1598.

Yes, we have snow (some) and freezing weather (a little). May have frost and some freezing from November to March. The average annual temperature of Albuquerque is fifty-six. Highest about ninety-five degrees. Lowest about twelve degrees above.

The "desert" is any land in this country where there is no irrigation, and all of the desert will raise anything if irrigated. There is no cactus in this vicinity.

I do not know how many barber-shops there are in Albuquerque. Probably a dozen of the better class and many others. Some of them as fine as any in the country. There are a couple of bands and a number of orchestras so you might get into the musical game as an extra.

Hotels? In the classified telephone directory there are twenty-six listed, although most of them do not serve meals. There are a nunber of good restaurants and five big and a number of smaller sanatoriums where they serve meals.

The "Santa Fé Trail" is a good automobile road, although in not the best of shape some parts of the year, as in Winter it is blocked with snow and mud in parts. During most of the year it is fine. About five hundred cars pass through here daily during the good season of the year, which means nine months.

You can camp along the road; thousands do so all the time. There is no danger of snakes or anything of that kind.

I am sending you some printed matter pertaining to Albuquerque which will give you additional information.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Travel in Abyssinia

WHEN you read the subjoined Q and A you will probably wonder what the "Maria Theresa dollar" referred to by Mr. Moffat, is. I spent an hour or so trying to find out; and all I could learn was that it was the same as a Levant thaler, an Austrian silver coin normally worth $1.02. Why Austria coined it, if she did, how it got the name of the great empress attached to it and how it came to be a medium of exchange for this far-off inland country which, so far as I know, never had any direct dealings with Austria, I can't say:

Question:—"I should be greatly obliged to you if you could give me any information regarding the cost of travel in the Kingdom of Abyssinia, Africa.

I am contemplating making a trip there and am anxious to know about what I should expect in the way of costs of travel per month in the interior of the country. This expedition will be in the form of an exploring party and probably would require a considerable staff of native bearers.

I should greatly appreciate anything that you could tell me regarding the cost and required equipment for such a trip.

A stamped, addressed envelop is enclosed for your convenience."—JOHN EAGHAN KELLY, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Moffat:—Your letter of inquiry regarding the cost of transport in Abyssinia has been forwarded on to me by our editor, and although Abyssinia is not included in my zone of work I may be able to afford you a little assistance as my zone—the Sudan—is a bordering country.

Transport of a heavy nature in Abyssinia would be rather expensive as all interior work would have to be done by native carriers and by canoes when in the vicinity of the rivers. The actual cost of carriers varies, as the currency, which is the Maria Theresa dollar, is controlled by the price of salt.

It sounds funny, but many funny things happen in Africa.

In the Sudan one carrier costs about 10 cents per day. I should think personally that $200 to $250 per month would clear all expenses for your transport and your personal necessities.

Regarding your equipment: Not knowing for what you are going to explore, I can not help you except as to your clothing, which should be light in weight; would suggest for preference khaki riding-breeches and shirt and leggings.

A mosquito curtain is a necessity, as is also a pith helmet. I regret I am unable to give you any further information; and what little I have given you I hope you will accept as given from hearsay and not from actual knowledge.

Wish you the very best of luck should you eventually reach Abyssinia.

If you want an answer, read the rules.

Trolling for Bluefish

FINE sport within sight of New York City:

Question.—"Please advise me as to trolling for bluefish in the Great South Bay, Long Island, in or near Fire Island inlet, or just outside, and fishing for bass in a lake near Tuxedo, New York.

I have a jointed salt-water bait rod, rather stiff and seven or eight feet long; large salt-water multiplying reel, several good split bamboo and cane-wood trout rods and salmon rods—among them are one or two Leonards—but no other reels or tackle." —PRENTICE STRONG, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Thompson:—You are pretty well equipped for trolling for bluefish, though perhaps you might desire a stiffer rod than the surf one you already have. It is a matter of fancy as to the kind of block tin squids you use to get results. The Belmar or the Winged Jig is popular, or the old standard kind. Now they use with good results the wooden minnows in what is called the panetella patterns with scale finish and then add dipsey sinker to make them go down well.

You are fixed for fly rods for bass as the heavier of your trout rods will do. Use flies ranging in size from No. 4 hooks to 3-o according to clarity of water. This is for fresh-water bass. The bass bugs and feather minnows also are good killers.

Have enameled line of sufficient size to bring out the action of your rod. You can use also straight eye-ringed hook flies with the addition of small spinners, which will attract bass often when they won't hit the standard kinds.

For bait casting for bass, use your preference in lengths from 4 to 6-3. You will like the longer ones the more you cast. Don't use a line over 15-pound test soft braided silk. Prefer 10-pound test for the small artificial lures and pork-rind baits.

Any of the wooden lures or spoons and spinners will do. But above all get the best multiplying reel you can afford with 80 or 100 yard capacity. If you do not know how to thumb line properly and don't want to wait to learn, get one of the modern anti-backlash reels.

I certainly envy you possession of your Leonard rods.

If I can be of further service and you want more information in detail please advise.

A Citrus Plant for Mexico

PUTTING the wild lime-tree to work:

Question:—"I am the owner of a small tract of land here in Mexico, on which there is a large grove of wild lime-trees. I have wondered about the feasibility of manufacturing citric acid crystals for exportation to the United States of America.

In your opinion is the project practicable for a man with small capital? In the event of its practicability, which section of Mexico would in your opinion be best for an enterprise of this character?

If you would kindly advise me of sources of detailed information *re* this subject, I should be greatly obliged.

"It being impracticable to obtain U. S. postage stamps at this time, I am enclosing a *chico perro* (ten centavos) to cover postage for your reply."—EUGENE LIVINGSTON, Tampico, Mexico.

Answer, by Mr. Mahaffey:—I have received your letter which came decorated with a request not to send any more coins through the mail as Mex postal regulations prohibit it. I suppose they think such proceedings as tempting too much the postal employees.

The only plant for making citrus-plant products in Mexico I know of as being a success is at La Sabana, near Acapulco. I am inclined to believe that they make citrate of lime, which is refined in the U. S. and that citrate of lime is easier to make than citric acid. However, it is evidently a proposition for considerable capital and considerable chemical knowledge. I had at one time full data on making citrate of lime but have mislaid it.

You can get information from the University of California, Berkeley, Calif., as in California there are a number of plants making citrus by-products. The U. S. Department of Agriculture have a chemical laboratory somewhere in California, and they can give you full data also; but I do not know just where they are located.

The process requires considerable equipment to make a commercial product; and I believe that a vacuum-evaporating process is required to crystallize the citric acid, and think this is not necessary in making citrate of lime. Another by-product might be oil distilled from the limes after the juice was pressed out.

I would hardly advise you to undertake such a proposition until you went thoroughly over the whole thing. One thing certain is that you would have to employ a chemist to start it out and that would prove quite expensive. Through the U. S. Dept. of Commerce you can locate possible buyers in the U. S., and of course you know how to get in touch with buyers in Great Britain.

The American consul at Acapulco might put you in touch with the makers there, who are Americans, I believe, and they might give you pointers on making citrate of lime. It is worth trying. Any part of Mexico where reasonably cheap labor and a plentiful supply of limes and lemons could be obtained, would be sufficient. The main thing is a good supply of raw material.

I will write to the University of California to save time and will forward answers as soon as received.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Tripping the Mississippi

GREAT!

Question:—"Four of us are planning to take a trip down the Mississippi River from Cincinnati, Ohio, to New Orleans. As far as the Mississippi is concerned we are greenhorns; but we have all had experience in camping and in the handling of canoes. We would certainly appreciate it if you would answer the following questions and give us any additional information which you think would be of benefit to us:

If the trip was taken by canoe, how long would it take us to go from Cincinnati to New Orleans, making no allowance for stopovers at various points of interest?

Would it be practical to equip our canoes for sailing? If so, how should we go about it?

What equipment and supplies should we take, and to what extent could we buy supplies along the way?

What would be the most advisable time of the year to make the trip? We would like to make it in late Summer or early Fall, but might be able to arrange the time to suit the conditions.

Would it be worth while to invest in a small power-boat to make the trip, and if so what type of such a boat would you suggest?

What would be the chances of selling such a boat in New Orleans?

We have heard that a trip from New Orleans along the Gulf coast to Florida is practical and some sport. What would you say about this?

Omitting the price of canoes, what would be the approximate cost of supplies and equipment necessary to take us to New Orleans?

On the whole do you think this trip would be worth while? We will certainly appreciate any help you can give us."—C. L. WOOLDRIDGE, JR., Antioch College, Yellow Springs, O.

Answer, by Mr. Zerr:—Regarding your first question as to time by canoe. From Cincinnati to Cairo the distance is 498.3 miles and from Cairo to New Orleans a distance of 973.2 miles, total of 1471.5 miles. Now the question is, how fast can you fellows paddle?

As to sailing. This question is answered in conjunction with a power boat. Am not in favor of a sailboat or its equipment; rather a motor boat. You ought to be able to pick up a good boat around Cincinnati very cheap. About $250.

Why not pick up a good canoe and get one of those detachable motors and pick up enough gasoline to last you until you reach the next town? The chances of selling a boat of this kind around New Orleans should be very good, but am not familiar with the market down there.

In regard to the trip along the Gulf coast to Florida. I say keep your hands off of such a venture. It must be remembered that the Gulf is part of the ocean, and only ocean-going vessels should ply it, and only men experienced would venture such an undertaking. This would be bad business, and I would not be responsible for advising any party to do it.

Regarding equipment, why not use your regular camp duffel? As to supplies, you'll find enough towns along the way, instead of loading up and throwing the most of it away, adding to expense.

In regard to the cost of such a trip. This ought to be easy figuring. Depends on how much you fellows need, say eats, clothes, dainties, movies, etc. You're not going through a wilderness; instead there are many towns where you will want to stop and get supplies.

As to what I think of such a trip. Don't tempt me. It's great. Beats all travel by Pullman; and you can see some country, and I am sure you will enjoy every mile of the river.

As to the time of the year. Why not make it late in May or September? You will have good water, and it will not be too hot.

Hiking, Saskatchewan to Arizona

PAY your way as you go in either honest money or honest work. Mouchers and panhandlers will find themselves unwelcome:

Question:—"Am six feet one inch in stocking feet and weigh 175 pounds, 22 years old. Very fond of outdoors and walking. Have worked on farm a good deal but don't like it. Have camped out in The Pas country and western Ontario. Last Summer I went broke on a prospecting trip in Rice Lake mining district. Got a good claim but have been unable to sell it. Nothing doing in mining just now here.

At present I am clerk in a store and hate the indoor work but owing to circumstances have to stay till June. Then I am planning on going on a walking-tour through southern Saskatchewan, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado and Arizona, taking in Yellowstone Park, Pike's Peak, Grand Cañon, etc., in fact seeing everything that is worth seeing in the cities and also the out-of-the-way places. If I get along all right I may continue on through Mexico, Central America and South America. Would take along a blanket, a few cooking-utensils (very few) a small take-down .22 rifle and my 3A kodak and a change of clothes and grub as needed, all in a pack-sack.

Where can I get maps of these four States?

Is this the best route?

How can I earn money as I go along without stopping and getting a job, which of course I could do in emergency?

Could you suggest anything further to be added to my outfit, still keeping it light? I can do without a tent.

I would be alone unless I pick up a suitable companion in the mean time. If this is outside your department will you kindly pass it on to where it belongs? I will have between $200 and $300 to start with."—R. P. DENMARK, Langenburg, Saskatchewan, Canada.

Answer, by Mr. Davis:—The only flaw I can pick in your plan for a walking-tour through the West from Canada to Arizona is your proposal to earn money as you go along without stopping and without getting a job. It can't be done with profit to yourself and peace of mind to the denizens of the regions you traverse.

Entirely too many individuals are obsessed with the same idea—that they can gather the shekels as they go along, like apples from a tree. As a result, the feeling is growing in the communities along the main arteries of travel that every wanderer is either an obnoxious pedler or a charitable nuisance. The sum of money you will have should be nearly enough to see you through.

If I were you, when I struck an interesting burg or district I would make up my mind to get a job for a few days and while picking up some extra change to absorb some of the atmosphere. You will get a whole lot more out of your trip that way.

For road maps of the several States write the State Highway Commission, or the Commissioner of Emigration. Your route is virtually that of the Park-to-Park Highway. Write Gus Holm, managing secretary of the National Park-to-Park Highway Association, Denver, Colo., for the official publication and guide. It gives you tables of distances and a description of each place on the route.

The outfit one will take on such a hike depends upon the individual. What will suffice for one will not do at all for another. I would start with two blankets instead of one, several extra pairs of heavy socks and an extra pair of light shoes. These are the only changes I suggest.

Home of the Rubber-Tree

PERU:

Question:—"Would like you to give me some information regarding settling in Peru, or you may advise me which South American republic is the best suited for me.

I am a man of twenty-nine, single and have a little money. I have been what you may call a globe-trotter for eight years and have seen quite a bit of hardships and adventures. But I desire to settle down in some new country where the prospects are good. I don't care how far it is from civilization; in fact I prefer it in the wilds.

I have heard quite a bit of Peru and have read some on it. I am at present in the Navy, but upon my discharge I am going to South America, but would like to know which republic would be the best for me. I intend starting a rubber plantation, and well do I know that it takes quite a number of years before the trees are large enough to tap, so I am going to ask you a few questions.

How many acres will the Government allow one man to buy?

What is the average price per acre? What is this land the Government cedes to settlers good for? Is stock-raising considered profitable in Peru? Does the land have to be irrigated? Does the Government require the land to be fenced?

Is it possible to raise cotton, grain, sugar-cane, cattle, fruit, etc., until the rubber-trees are large enough to tap?

How long or how many years does it take for a rubber tree to get large enough to tap?

Are there any wild rubber-trees growing in South America? Does the Government hold any oil, mineral or timber rights?

I am a gas engineer and machinist by trade. Do you think I could get work down there until I got settled? How do wages compare with those in the U. S. A.?"—K. F. PASCHALL, Care of P. M., Seattle, Wash.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—The eastern slopes of Peru are ideal for the cultivation of rubber; in fact this is the native habitat of the best of the rubber-producing trees. Land may be had in large quantities for a few cents per acre direct from the Peruvian Government. The best of the rubber grows in the lowlands, which are not so suitable for a white man's residence as the cooler uplands some thousand feet or more above sea-level.

The main setback to your project is the recent entry of England as the greatest rubber-producing country in the world. From seeds stolen from Brazil and shipped as botanical specimens and planted in the Malay States and other East Indian countries immense plantations, worked by coolie labor, have sprung up. These English estates are able to manufacture rubber cheaper and better than the native rubber-gatherer of the upper Amazon, and due to this reason much hardship has come to the trade in its native place. Rubber was over three dollars per pound in 1913 but now is only a fraction of that price. It would be well to investigate before making any extensive plans such as you contemplate.

Peru raises the finest cotton in the world and is par excellence in many other agricultural products; but I can not speak very highly for a man's chances in the rubber-growing industry.

Write Pan American Union, Washington, D. C., for illustrated booklet, "Peru." Also see sketch under same heading in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Canoe Trips in Quebec

THROUGH Old-France-in-America:

Question:—"A friend of mine and the writer propose to start out about September 1st for a three weeks' trip. He is not accustomed to roughing it and would prefer a sporting camp. I may induce him to take a canoe trip. Can you give me a general idea of what we can do and where we can go, etc.? I am sorry that I can not make my request for information more specific, but my own thoughts on the subject are so hazy that it is impracticable to do so. We want to loaf and fish and canoe and do what we like to suit ourselves.

I enclose addressed envelop and a five-cent International Reply Coupon."—TERENCE FARLEY, New York.

Answer, by Maj. Belford:—I suggest that you go to Rouse's Point on Lake Champlain and from there follow down the Richelieu River to Sorel, then up the St. Lawrence to Montreal. This is a pleasant trip, not too arduous, nice country, settled, some good towns, and farm-houses all along. This makes provisioning an easy matter.

Or, starting from Lake Megantic, Quebec, on the Canadian Pacific Railway, you could descend the Chaudière River to the St. Lawrence near Quebec City. This route passes through French country.

ASK "ADVENTURE" editors are appointed with extreme care. If you can meet our exacting requirements and qalify as an expert on some topic or territory not now covered, we shall be glad to talk matters over with you. Address F. K. NOYES, *Adventure*, New York.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

FIRST an old song of the plains that should bring a smile or two of recognition from a number of the old-timers. This I print exactly as it came to me except that in the first line of the sixth verse I have substituted the italicized words in place of the more picturesque language of the original.

In his letter my correspondent says: "I have sung this song around a buffalo-chip fire along in the early '80s in the Panhandle of Texas and on the Chisholm Trail. Since then I have dealt faro and played cards all over the world, and have heard some good singing. But I still can smell the buffalo chips smoke when I think of this song. It was popular on the Pecos, Canadian and Red Rivers and clean up to B. C.—wherever cowpunchers camped."

The Buffalo Skinners

(*Text of J. W. F.*)

Come all you jolly buffalo skinners and listen to my song,
If you will pay attention I won't detain you long.
'Tis concerning some jolly bull-skinners that did agree to go
And spend a summer pleasantly on the Range of the Buffalo.

It was in the town of Jacksboro in the spring of seventy-three
That a man by the name of Crigor came walking up to me;
Says he, "How do you do, young fellow, and how would you like to go
And spend a summer pleasantly on the Range of the Buffalo?"

On being out of employment, I answered unto him,
"Going out with you on the Buffalo Range depends upon the pay.
If you will pay good wages and transportation too,
I will go with you to the Buffalo Range and spend a month or two."

"Oh yes, I'll pay good wages and transportation too,
If you will go with me to the Buffalo Range and spend the summer through;
But if you get tired and homesick and to Jacksboro go,
I will not pay you wages from the Range of the Buffalo."

By such talk and flatteration he enlisted quite a crew, I think 'twas twenty-one,
And when we got to Peas River our troubles then begun.
The very first tail I tried to split—Christ! How I cut my thumb!
And out skinning those damned old stinkers, our lives we had no show,
For the Indians watched to pick us off out skinning the Buffalo.

We lived on *rotten* buffalo hump and damned old *iron-wedge* bread,
Strong coffee, croton water to drink, and a bull hide for a bed;
And the way the gray-backs worked on us, God knows it was not slow!
God grant there is no hell on earth like the Range of the Buffalo!

The season being ended, old Crigor could not pay—
The outfit was so extravagant he was in debt that day—
But among us jolly bull-skinners bankruptcy would not go,
So we left poor Crigor's bones to bleach on the Range of the Buffalo.

Now we are 'cross the Brazos River and homeward we are bound,
And in this hell-fired country we never shall be found.
We will go home to our wives and sweethearts and tell others not to go
To that God-forsaken hell on earth—the Range of the Buffalo.

THE next is quite different—a bit of genuine folk-song as sung in Kentucky and West Virginia some twenty-five years ago. It is a portion of an almost endless story of a desperado called "Railroad Bill." I'd like to know more about him and to have other versions of the song.

Railroad Bill

(*Text of Jackson Taylor, Jr.*)

Railroad Bill was settin' at the tank
Waitin' for the train they call Nancy Hank,
Railroad Bill.

Railroad Bill was settin' at the curve,
Waitin' for the passenger, but he didn't have the nerve,
Railroad Bill.

Railroad Bill was a desperate man,
Shot the lantern from the brakeman's hand,
Railroad Bill.

Railroad Bill had a .44 Colt,
Shot all the buttons off the brakeman's coat,
Railroad Bill.

I come in on Number One,
Saw Railroad Bill with a .44 gun,
Railroad Bill.

I come in on Number Two,
Railroad Bill had just gone through,
Railroad Bill.

I come in on Number Three,
Railroad Bill I could not see,
Railroad Bill.

I come in on Number Four,
Saw Railroad Bill with his .44,
Railroad Bill.

Some o' these nights 'bout half past four,
You'll hear the mighty rumble of a .44,
Railroad Bill.

Some o' these nights 'bout nine o'clock
This ole world's a goin' to reeve an' rock,
Railroad Bill.

Some o' these nights 'twix' sun an' sun
The Lawd's a-goin' to stop your lyin' tongue,
Railroad Bill.

DURING the past year a number of letters have been returned to me marked "unclaimed." If the men whose names appear in the following list will send me their present addresses, I'll be glad to forward their letters:

A. Coston; J. Finley; Earle M. Gray; Edward Lester; W. E. Mangus; K. W. Mason; Leo C. Mendenhall; Harry Morley; F. A. Morrow; Wm. R. Nolan; S. S. Piper; Earl J. Stephenson; Joseph R. Watts; and W. A. Willard.

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all questions concerning them, direct to R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif. *DO NOT* send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

OCTOBER 30TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and **two complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE DEATH WATCH — *Lewis H. Kilpatrick*
Darkness, a dead man, and a guilty conscience.

SOMETHING'S DOING IN MEXICO — *Chester T. Crowell*
And *Sam Tupper* was in the middle of it.

OM Part III — *Talbot Mundy*
Lamaism figures in a new folk-play.

GREAT DAYS — *Gordon Young*
The waterfront gossips had given the *Clarendon* a bad name.

BEST BUGLER IN THE WORLD — *Barry Scobee*
There were two of them.

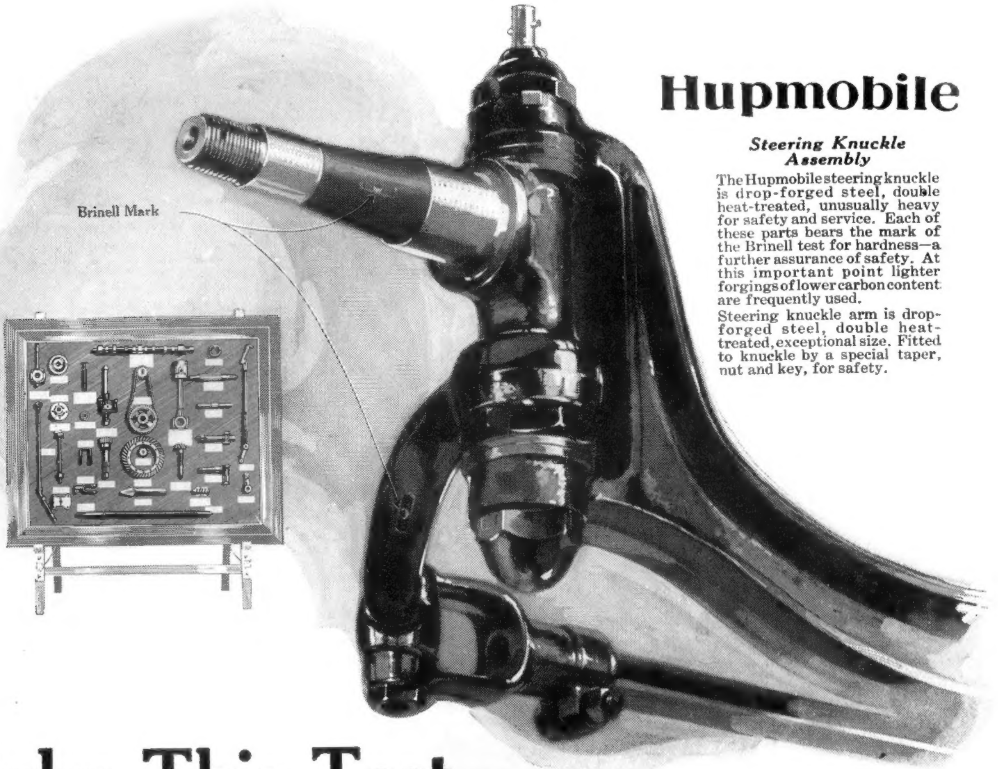
THE MEEKNESS OF MUG-WA — *William Byron Mowery*
It was the least of his bag of tricks.

SKIPPER — *Richard C. Gill*
He was nearly an ideal captain.

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long stories* by W. C. Tuttle, F. R. Buckley, Hugh Pendexter, Alvin F. Harlow and Chief Caupolican, Harold Lamb, Arthur D. Howden Smith, William P. Barron, Leonard H. Nason and John Webb; a long narrative poem by Berton Braley; and short stories by William Byron Mowery, Charles Tenney Jackson, F. St. Mars, Thomas Topham, Thomson Burtis, G. W. Barrington, Raymond S. Spears, Rolf Bennett, Royce Brier, George E. Holt, Alan Le May, Nevil Henshaw and others; stories of explorers among the Eskimos, guardsmen in old Italy, sheriffs in Texas, John Paul Jones in Russia, sky-pilots and sea-pilots, doughboys on the Western front, cowboys on the Western range, vikings on the North Sea, hijackers on the Mississippi, daring men in dangerous places up and down the earth.

Hupmobile



Steering Knuckle Assembly

The Hupmobile steering knuckle is drop-forged steel, double heat-treated, unusually heavy for safety and service. Each of these parts bears the mark of the Brinell test for hardness—a further assurance of safety. At this important point lighter forgings of lower carbon content are frequently used.

Steering knuckle arm is drop-forged steel, double heat-treated, exceptional size. Fitted to knuckle by a special taper, nut and key, for safety.

Make This Test—

It Proves That the Hupmobile Is the Car for You to Buy

Regardless of how you personally feel, or what you know about the Hupmobile, it is the one car you owe it to yourself to investigate before you spend your money. More, it is the car you ought to buy.

For the simple but important reason that no man who earns his income is justified in buying a car till he knows that it matches the Hupmobile in quality and value.

The New Way to Be Sure

How are you going to tell, you ask, when practically the same claims are made for cars of widely different characteristics and varying prices.

That's true enough—and the answer is not there. But the answer is in this, and it is definite and concrete:-

There is nothing hazy or misleading about the mechanical units and parts of a car. And Hupmobile gives you now the only hard-headed, practical way to get the truth about a car.

Go to the Hupmobile dealer and check the Hupmobile parts displays. They show the finished parts and units that Hupmobile uses. The Hupmobile specifications are printed in black.

In red, significantly enough, are printed the lesser and poorer specifications and materials that are often used.

These are the Important Things

There's no mystery in a car—only good or bad design; careful or careless workmanship; costly or cheap material—and the sum total of these means a splendid buy or a poor buy.

You know the extra value that Hupmobile has always had; its unfailing performance over long periods; its high re-sale value.

These peculiar and distinctive Hupmobile qualities are due to the very things you see in the parts displays.

Make your own comparison—or ask the dealer to show you—but do it.

It is the only way we know of to get at the truth and prove conclusively that you should buy a Hupmobile.

Hupp Motor Car Corporation
Detroit, Michigan

BRICK

CONCRETE—TILE—PLASTER

JUST OUT!
AUDELS MASONS AND BUILDERS GUIDE 1
BRICK WORK BRICK LAYING BONDING DESIGNS
AUDELS MASONS AND BUILDERS GUIDE 2
BRICK FOUNDATIONS ARCHES TILE SETTING ESTIMATING
AUDELS MASONS AND BUILDERS GUIDE 3
CONCRETE MIXING PLACING FORMS REINFORCED STUCCO
AUDELS MASONS AND BUILDERS GUIDE 4
PLASTERING STONE MASONRY STEEL CONSTRUCTION BLUE PRINTS
AUDELS MASONS AND BUILDERS GUIDE No 4

Audels new set for Masons & Builders is a practical, up-to-the-minute trade assistant for **Bricklayers, Plasterers** and all **Cement Workers.** A complete course and trade-teacher for the apprentice; a working companion for the Journeyman; a ready reference for the boss builder; a practical instructor for the home builder. These Guides for Bricklayers, Stone Masons, Cement workers, Plasterers and Tile Setters are based on modern practice. They explain in practical, concise language and clear illustrations, diagrams, graphes and pictures, the methods, principles, advances and short cuts—including instructions on How to Figure and Calculate various jobs.

AUDELS MASONS & BUILDERS GUIDES

Easy Terms—One Dollar Per Month **$1**

Complete Set, 4 Vols., Price, $6

Pocket Size, Flexible Covers

Gilt Edge, Clearly Printed

1080 Pages—All Easy to Read

2067 Trade Illustrations

Shipped for Free Trial, Test and Examination

FREE TRIAL OFFER

If you want to know the advancements in building progress—save mistakes—save work—save materials—solve your problems, it will pay you to send in this coupon NOW. Examine and test out the Guides for yourself. No obligation to buy unless satisfied. No money now. Nothing to pay postman.

Fill in with pencil and send TO-DAY!

THEO. AUDEL & CO., 72 Fifth Avenue, New York City

Ship me postpaid, for free examination, AUDELS MASONS & BUILDERS GUIDES (4 numbers). If satisfactory I will mail you $1 within 5 days and $1 monthly until $6 is paid.

Name..........

Address..........

Occupation..........

Employed by..........

Ref. ....

....

9 F-202

Audels Guides Tell You All About:—

BRICK (Guide No. 1) brick laying, classifications, strength tests, different kinds of mortar; classification of tools, scaffolding, Brick Designs, Bonding, walls, veneering, corners, openings, setting frames, foundation walls, piers, chimneys, underpinning, repairing old work, arches.

TILE (Guide No. 2) Tile Setting, hollow tile, porous terra cotta partitions, shell wall tiles, clay roofing tiles, sizes, sorting and grading, concrete setting beds, reinforcement, mortar beds, troweling, beating in, straight edge test, ceramic mosaic; ESTIMATING. How to figure brick work, examples, tables, labor estimating.

CONCRETE (Guide No. 3) materials, aggregates, cement, mixing, placing forms. Reinforced Concrete, metal systems, bonding, anchoring, how to figure concrete work, costs of materials and carpenter work; Stucco, application on new and old buildings, concrete block and tile walls, foundations.

PLASTER (Guide No. 4) on wood and metal, wall boards, plasterers' materials and tools, plastering on stone, brick or concrete. Stone Masonry, selection and strength of stone, cutting, finishes, classification of masonry, derricks and rigging, Steel Construction, Outline of, structural shapes, beams with girders, riveting rules; Building Suggestions, garage, pavement, ice house, etc.